KIT AND KITTY

R·D·BLACKMORE

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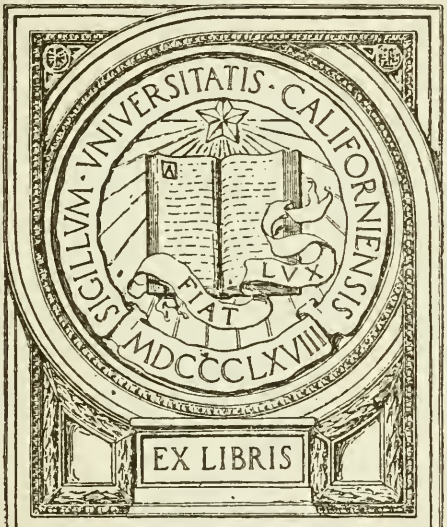

KIT AND KITTY,

A Story of West Middlesex.

BY

R. D. BLACKMORE

AUTHOR OF "SPRINGHAVEN," "CHRISTOWELL," ETC.

"Si tu Caia, ego Caius."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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KIT AND KITTY.

CHAPTER I.

ROGUES FALL OUT.

As we walked very slowly through the wilderness of thistles, which had once been a fair park trimly kept, I disturbed the mind of Sam—which was busy with abstruse calculations of all sorts of odds—by asking rather suddenly what I was to say, and how I should conduct myself in the presence of this man. For I felt a deep dislike to him, not only because he had been such a plague to Kitty, but on account of his bad character and loose ways. And my ill-will towards him had been increased by his cowardly treatment—as it seemed to me—of the patient people round him, and encroachment on their loyalty.

"You mustn't ask me, my dear fellow,"

answered Sam; "the thing is out of my line altogether. You wanted to see him, and here he is. I must leave you to the light of nature, although he is rather a dark specimen. Perhaps he knows nothing about your trouble. But he is up to most of Downy Bulwrag's tricks, or at any rate knows when to suspect him. And if he has had a row with Bulwrag, and can see his way to harm him, he will do it. For Pots is a very spiteful fellow. You had better appear first as my companion. I can manage not to let him catch your name; for he is rather hard of hearing, though he won't allow it. I shall work matters round till Downy's name comes up; and your business will be to hold your tongue and listen, until you can strike in with advantage. He will see me, I think, because I wrote to tell him that I had a little money for him. There is nothing like that to fetch Pots."

After a little reconnoitring from a window at the flank, we were admitted by an ancient footman, who looked as if he never got his wages, and shown into a shabby room, fusty, damp, and comfortless. Here we waited nearly half an hour, while Henderson drummed on the floor with his stick, and at last began to blow a horn which he found behind a looking-glass.

Then the master of the house appeared, and shook hands with Sam, and bowed to me.

It is easy enough to introduce a stranger, so that his name shall be still unknown; and Sir Cumberleigh, not being quick of hearing, received my name as "Johnson." "On the turf?" he enquired; and Sam said, "Yes; he has been on it every day this week;" which was true enough in one sense; and I longed to be back in a garden again, where we grow rogues, but nothing like so many.

"Very glad to see you, very glad indeed, young sir." This gentleman offered his hand as he spoke; but I bowed, as if I had not seen it. It may be a stupid old bit of priggery; but no man's hand comes into mine, while I am longing to smite him in the face. And I could not help smiling at our host's new manners, so different entirely from what he showed in London —unless he had been vastly misdescribed to me. He pretended now to dignity and distance, and a fine amount of grandeur; for no other reason that I could guess, except that he was upon his native soil, breathing the air of his ancestral vaults, and cheating folk who let him cheat because his fathers did it.

But all this air of loftiness had no effect on

Sam; who had rubbed whiskers many times even with a Duke, when their minds were moving on a good thing together.

"Got a bit of rhino for you, Pots," he said, and I thought it showed little good taste on his part, for Sam's ancestors had been stable-boys, and I have always been a good Conservative; "not so much as I could wish; but every little is a help. And everybody says that you are awfully hard up. Hope it isn't true; but we must have seen you at the July, if you had been at all flush."

"I have not been very fortunate of late," replied the Baronet, still keeping up his dignity on my account; "and my property here has been much impaired by—by a lot of things that did not come off. I was not at Newmarket, because I intend to have nothing more to do with racing matters; which I must leave to people who are sharper than myself, and have different views of integrity. But anything really due to me——"

"Perhaps I had better not say any more about it;" Henderson's black eyes were twinkling with contempt. "I had no right properly to receive the money; and if I had thought twice about it, I should have refused, for I had no commission from you to collect it; but Georgie

Roberts knew that I was coming to see you, and knowing me so well he took my receipt on your behalf, because he was anxious to square up. I'll just return it to him, and he can send you a cheque. I heard a thing afterwards that put me in the wrong. Bulwrag is the proper chap to act for you. And he seems to have been there after all, but he cannot have turned up, till Friday. I'll send back these notes, and his receipt to Georgie." Sam put away his pocket-book, and looked contented; but Sir Cumberleigh did not see it so.

"No, Sam, no! Business is business. I will write you a receipt. How much did you say it was? Let me see. I forget these trifles. Somewhere about eighty-five, if I remember."

"Forty-five," said Sam; and I was struck with the amount, because it was the very sum that had so grieved me. "He had forty against you upon the Levant. Downy managed that for you."

"Downy Bulwrag never did me any good, and he never will;" said the Baronet sternly, yet looking round, as if afraid of echoes. "He is always getting me into some vile scrape."

"For instance, about the young lady at Hounslow. Did he carry on any more with that affair?"

Sam put this question in the most off-handed manner, just as if he had said—"Any news to-day?" But being unused to any mystery on shuffling, I looked for the answer with extreme anxiety, and Sir Cumberleigh observed it, and was put upon his guard.

"How can I tell? I know nothing of his doings;" he answered, with his eyes on me, while speaking to my friend. "Downy is too deep for me; he is always up to something. Mr. Johnson, do you know him? You almost look as if you did."

"No, I have never had that honour," I answered as calmly as I could; "I live in the country, and have little to do with London, except when I am there on business."

"Very well then, I may tell you, Henderson," our host continued, as he put aside the notes, after counting them, and giving his receipt; "that Master Downy has not behaved of late in a very friendly manner towards myself. He has not the high principle, I am afraid, which has always governed my conduct, at least in all matters of friendship and money. My rule is rather to wrong myself, than any other living being. We have held these estates for some centuries, Mr. Johnson; and no Hotchpot has

ever yet sullied the name. Fortune has continually been against us; but we have borne ourselves bravely, and won universal esteem, and even affection. I never praise myself; but when my time is over, the same thing will always be said of me."

He spoke with such firm conviction that I was impressed with his words, and began to feel sure that report must have wronged him; until I thought of Kitty, who was no harsh judge of character.

"Hear, hear!" cried Sam; "you have done it well, Pots. After that, you can scarcely do less than invite us to drink your good health in a bottle of Champagne."

"That I will, with pleasure. Only you must excuse me, while I see to it myself. The Hotchpots are down in the world, Mr. Johnson, because we could never curry favour. We cannot keep our butlers and our coach-and-four, and our deer-park, as we used to do. Instead of that, I keep the key of my own cellar. But I feel no shame in that. The shame lies rather——"

"Look sharp, old chap; I am as dry as a herring." Sam was always rough and rude in his discourse; and Sir Cumberleigh set off, with a significant glance at me.

"He has taken a liking to you, the old rogue," Henderson informed me, when the door was shut; "because he believes that you suck all his brag in, like a child. You stick to that; it suits you well, for your face is no end of innocent. An old stupe like that can be buttered up to anything, if it is laid on by the right card. You don't suck up to him, you see; but you let him suck up to himself. We shall draw him of everything he knows, and what matters more, everything he suspects. Only you leave the whip-hand to me; green you are, and green you will be to the last."

"You are altogether out in that," I said, though I knew it was hopeless to reason with him; "you fellows, who see such a lot of fast life, are none the more sagacious for it. You doubt what everybody says, unless you can find a bad motive for it. And you generally go wrong in the end, because you can only see black all round. But if this is a black sheep, you take the shearing of him. Only I hate to go under a wrong name."

These words of mine proved that I was not a fool, at least to my own satisfaction. Sam stared at me, as much as to say—"There is more in you, than I thought there was;" but I did not

care to press the point; for he might take a huff, and say, "Do it yourself then." Only I resolved to listen carefully, and see if there was anything to be learned. And before he could answer, our host returned, with a bottle of Champagne under each arm, and the old retainer following with glasses and a corkscrew having a blade attached to it. And I thought that he could not be bad altogether, but must at least have intervals.

"Henderson, will you oblige me by being our—what's his name? Diomede, or something. I have a touch of rheumatism in one wrist. No corkscrew wanted, if the cork is cork, and not wood, as a great many of them are. But he understands it. Well done, Sam! Fill for Mr. Johnson first. Ah, this is the right sort. Now we know what we are up to. Mr. Johnson, your good health, and the same to you, Sam!"

"Sir Cumberleigh, here's confusion to your enemies," cried Sam, standing up to give force to it; "and especially to one whom I could name. Ah, he has led you a pretty dance, and feathered his own nest out of it. However, we won't say any more about him. A downy fellow can't help being downy. Every man for his own hand, in this little world."

"Sam, you know more than you have said. You go about more than I do now. Do you mean to say, that he has let me in purposely?"

"No, I never could believe that he would do it. It looks rather queer, but it must be straight enough. No doubt everything can be explained. You remember about *Flying Goose* at least?"

They began to talk a quantity of racing stuff, which was nothing but jargon to me; till Sir Cumberleigh rose from his chair, and struck the table, glaring with his eyes, and turning purple in the face.

"Then his name is not Bulwrag, but blackguard;" he exclaimed, turning round to me, to attest it. "And as soon as we meet, I shall tell him so." Then he swore a round of oaths, which were of no effect, but to hurt himself, and turn up the corners of the pity we were spreading for him. What had he lost? Money only. I had lost more. I held my tongue.

"You must not be too hard upon him;" Sam began to soften, to make him harder. "Every man for his own hand. Fair play, Pots; you would do it yourself."

"Not for any one who trusted me. That makes all the difference. He thinks he can do

what he likes with me. He shall find the difference. I know a trick or two of his that would send him to the Devil, if I let out."

"Well, we won't talk about any secrets now;" said Sam as cool as a cucumber, while I was like a red-hot iron; "his private affairs are no concern of ours; and we don't want to hear of them. Johnson is a very steady-going chap, with a wife and six kids. We won't corrupt him, Pots."

"Not much fear of that, if he is on the turf," Sir Cumberleigh replied, with a wink at me; "see a good bit of the world there, don't you, Mr. Johnson?"

I nodded my head, and turned away; for I never was much of an actor, and now I could not trust my voice for words. But Sir Cumberleigh was as full of his own wrongs, as I was of mine in a different way.

"I know a thing or two," he went on, becoming more determined, as we feigned to check him, "that would stop his little tricks for a long time to come. He would have to be off to the Continent again, if I were to treat him as he deserves."

"Then don't do it, Pots. Forgive and forget; that's the proper tip nowadays. Who

doesn't try to let you in? It is no concern of mine—but let us talk of something else. I dare say he is a good fellow, after all."

"Is he?" cried Sir Cumberleigh, working himself up; "I may have done a thing or two, in my time. But I never harmed man or woman, out of pure spite. Every man must consider his own interest, and try to hurt no one, when it does not help himself. That is my idea of the rule of life. But it is not Master Downy's, I can tell you that."

"Never mind, old fellow. Let us drink his good health;" Sam lifted his glass, but our host set down his. "Whenever I hear a poor fellow run down, I begin to think of all that is good in him. And I don't believe Downy would hurt any one, unless he was obliged to do it, on his own account. He made a pot of money, and he dropped a bit of yours. But you must not score against him for a little thing like that."

"It is useless to talk to you, Henderson. You have not been hit, and you may whistle over it. But I'll just ask Mr. Johnson what he thinks, for I can see that he is a man of proper feeling. Now what should you say, Mr. Johnson, of a fellow, who wanted to marry a girl

who did not like him, because he thought she had a lot of money; and then when she married a very quiet man, who took her without a half-penny, could not let them be happy with one another, but got up some infernal scheme to separate them?"

"I should say he was a scoundrel too bad to be hanged;" I answered with warmth unaffected; and I was going to say more, but Sam checked me with a glance.

"Oh come, no fellow would ever do such a thing as that;" he spoke with contemptuous disbelief. "Any man must be a fool, who would get into such a scrape for nothing."

"Then Downy Bulwrag is a fool, as well as what you called him, Mr. Johnson. I could tell you the story, if I chose; or at least I could tell you a part of it. But it would not interest you; and it is a long in and out of rascality. Well, I won't say any more about it; and I don't know how he managed it. But he will have a score to settle about that, some day."

"That he will, and a bitter one;" I began, with hands clenched, and heart throbbing; but Sam kicked me under the table, and whispered, while Sir Cumberleigh was reaching for the other bottle—

"Don't be such a gone idiot. Leave it to me—can't you?"

"I should have thought Downy was too sharp for that;" Sam stroked his chin, and looked sceptical. "Of course, I don't know him as you do, Pots. But I should have thought he was about the last man you could find to risk his hide for mere larkiness."

"Well, I don't know that he risked very much. The young man is in the agricultural line; and they are fair game for any one, and have been so for the last twenty years. You may stamp on those fellows, and they rather like it. By George, if we treated the Mill-owners so, they would have marched upon London long ago. But a fellow with no kick in him must expect to get plenty of it from his neighbours."

These were my sentiments to a hair, coming straight to me from Uncle Corny; and at any other time I should have struck in boldly, with larger capacity of speech than thought. But to him who has no home to defend, politics are as a tinkling cymbal, instead of a loaded cannon.

"What part of the world was it in?" Sam Henderson asked, that the subject might not

slip away; "that sort of thing would never do in our part of the world; though we call ourselves pretty rural still."

"Well, I don't know exactly where it was. And we had better not say any more about it." Sir Cumberleigh became suspicious at the first sign of direct enquiry. "After all, I dare say there was no harm done. And perhaps the young fellow was glad to be quit of her, before she had time to run up any bills. Although she was a devilish nice girl, I believe. But who could want more than three weeks of any woman? Except for the sake of her tin, of course. Mr. Johnson, you agree with me about that, I can see."

"Nothing of the sort," I answered sternly, forgetting how I wrecked my purpose by my indignation; "a good wife is the greatest blessing any man can have. And the man who robs him of her is no man, but is a Devil."

"You had better set Johnson after your friend Downy;" Sam Henderson struck in, as Sir Cumberleigh stared at me. "You see how a Benedict regards the subject. And I shall have to be of his opinion soon. Next week I shall lead to the Hymeneal halter, who do you

think ?—give you three guesses, and lay a fiver you don't hit it."

"Done with you!" cried our host, for I believe he knew. "Three chances, Mr. Johnson, you heard what he said. No. 1, Violet Hunter, such a stunning girl."

"Wrong. Try again. No Vi Hunter for me. Wouldn't have her, if she was dipped in diamonds."

"Well then, it must be Gerty Triggs, a fine young woman, and five thousand pounds."

"Wrong again. Only one go more. Have your flimsy ready."

"Oh, I say, it can't be Sally Chalker. That would be too much luck for a chap like you."

"It is Sally Chalker, and no mistake. Though I'll trouble you to call her Miss Chalker, Pots, until she is Mrs. Henderson. And I'd like to see any fellow come between us."

"Hand over," said Sir Cumberleigh; "well, Sam, you are in luck. What a lot of things you will put us up to then! Here's to your happiness! Well, this is good news indeed. Stop to dinner; we can have it early."

But Sam declined the honour; and we soon set forth for home, as nothing more could be extracted from our host, concerning the matter

which had brought us there. And Sam, who understood him pretty thoroughly, felt sure that he had already told us all he knew, and perhaps even more in the way of mere suspicion.

CHAPTER II.

TONY TONKS.

Once I met a man who was a mighty swimmer, spending half his waking time in the water, and even sleeping there sometimes, according to his own account; though I found it rather hard to believe that altogether. But one thing he told me, which I do believe, because it is not so far out of the way, and the same thing might have happened to myself almost.

He had made a wager to swim across one of those inlets, or arms of the sea, which may be found upon our western coast, where the tide runs in with great force and speed, over a vast expanse of sands.

The distance from headland to headland was less than he had often been able to traverse; but, being a stranger on that coast, he had not reckoned, as he should have done, upon the power and strong swirl of the tide. By these

he was soon so swung about, and almost carried under, that the sand-hills, where the people stood to watch him, stood still themselves, instead of slowly gliding by. And the yellow current flaked with white, across which he was striving, seemed to be the only thing that moved.

He began to doubt about his destination, whether in this world or the next; for the cup of his hands, as he fetched them back, and the concave impulse of his feet as he spread his toes behind him, seemed to tell nothing upon the vast body of water he was involved in; there was no slide of surface along his shoulder-blades, and his chin rose and fell at each labouring stroke, without budging an inch from the dip or the rise. He began to feel that he was beaten, and a quiet resignation sank into the stoutness of his heart, such as a brave man feels at death. And he never would have lived to tell the tale, except for a big voice from the shore, the voice of the very man who had the money hanging on it.

"Put your feet down, Tom," he cried; "for God's sake put your feet down."

The vanquished swimmer put his feet down, though he thought it was his death to do it; and

there he felt firm sand, and stood, with the tide which had threatened to engulf him rippling round his panting breast, and lapping his poor weary arms. There happened to be a spit of sand there, far away from shore and rock, and known to the boatmen only. There he stood, and renewed his strength, with cheers of encouragement from the shore; and then, as the rush of the tide was slackening, after filling the depths inshore, he threw his chest forward upon the water, and fought his way safely to the landing-place.

"But I would not take the money," he said; "if I had taken that man's money, I should have deserved to be drowned next time."

This appeared to me to be a noble tale, showing goodness on both sides, which is the true nobility. And it came to my memory now, because it seemed to apply to my present state. I had battled long with unknown waters, and against a tide too strong for me; and now, though still far away from land, I had obtained firm footing. By what cross purpose and crooked inrush, my power and pride had been washed away, was a question still as dark as ever; but now I could rest on the firm conviction, which had been only faith before, that

my Kitty still was true to me, though beguiled by some low stratagem. And I knew pretty surely who had done it, though it might be very hard to prove.

"Don't lose a day," said Uncle Corny, when I told him all we had done and heard; "never mind me, or the garden. You can make up for all that by and by; and you have left your part in first-rate order. That scoundrel follows in his mother's track; but he is ten times worse than she is, because he keeps his temper. You must try to do the same, my lad. It would never do to have a row with him, and to take him by the throat, as he deserves. There is nothing you can prove at present. And the moment he knows that you suspect him, he will double all his wiles and dodges. He might even make away with your poor wife. He would rather do that, than let you regain her, and convict him of his tricks."

"Bad as he is, he could never do that. I cannot believe that any person living, who knows what Kitty is, could raise his hand against her. But the wonder is, where can he have put her? Gentle as she is, she is not a fool; and she would never submit to be restrained by force. And all that sort of thing

is quite out of date now, at any rate in England."

"So people suppose; but stranger things are done, even in this country still. He may even have got her in a lunatic asylum, after driving her out of her senses first. Or more likely still, on the Continent somewhere. Why, they do worse things than that in Spain, and in Italy too, from what I have heard. And as for Turkey—why, bless my heart, they keep the women in sacks and feed them, till they are fat enough for the Sultan. And you heard that he was gone abroad. Mrs. Wilcox said so. That is what he has done with her; you may depend upon it."

"But she would not have travelled with him, Uncle. He would not have dared to take her into any public place. But don't talk about it; it drives me wild. I see nothing to do, but to force him to confess, to get him away somewhere by himself, and hold a pistol to his head. A blackguard is always a coward, you know."

"Nine out of ten are, but the tenth is not," my Uncle replied sententiously; "no sort of violence will serve our turn. We must try to be crafty as he is. The only plan I can see is to have him watched, followed everywhere

without his knowledge, and not put upon his guard by a syllable from us. We had no reason to do that till now; but now we have, for I feel pretty sure that old Hotchpot was right. You ought to have got more out of him."

"It was not be done. We tried everything. And I believe he knows no more than this—that before they quarrelled, the younger villain made a boast of it that he would have his revenge, but never let out what his plan was. And when Hotchpot heard that it had been done, he naturally concluded who had done it. When we compared notes, Sam and I agreed that in all probability there is nothing more than that."

"It is very unlucky for us," said my Uncle, "that Henderson is going to be married so soon. We cannot expect him to help us any more, for a long time to come; and he has twice the head that you have. I don't mean to say for useful work, for there you would beat him hollow, but for plotting, and scheming, and all sorts of dirty tricks. He has been brought up to those things from the cradle, and he can tell a lie splendidly, which you cannot. You are much too simple and truthful, Kit, just as I am, for

dealing with rogues and knaves. And he knows a lot more of the bad world than we do. He is hand in glove also with a host of swells, such as you and I never spoke to. Why, I never shook hands with a Lord in my life, although I should do it like a man—if he offered, mind, for I should wait for that. And you are in the same condition."

"Not a bit of it. I shook hands with two at Newmarket, and they seemed to think very well of me. But that reminds me that I met the very man for our job, if he would undertake it. And I believe he would, if we paid him well."

"For spying upon Bulwrag, you mean, Kit. I can't bear the idea of spying, even on that fellow. But I fear we must make up our minds to it, just as the Police watch a murderer. And as for the cost of it, I would go half, and I am sure your Aunt Parslow would pay the other half. But what makes you think that he would suit? A very sharp fellow is wanted, mind. Not a bit like Selsey Bill."

"If it must be done, he is the very man. But you shall not pay a farthing, Uncle Corny; you have plenty to do with your money. At any rate I will not ask you, until I have spent

all I have for the purpose. Your advice is quite enough for you to give, and it is worth more than money. See what I should have done without you now! I had made up my mind to pursue that fellow, and seize him, and shake the truth out of him. But I should only have shaken out a heap of lies, and probably got locked up for my trouble. But I see that your plan is the only wise one."

"You are a sensible young fellow, Kit, when you have good advisers. But who is this man of craft you were speaking of, and how has he got experience for a job like this?"

"He has been brought up to every kind of nasty work; and the nastier it is, the more he likes it. He is a spy on horses, to watch them in their trials, and sneak into their boxes, and learn everything they think of. It seems to be a regular profession, where they keep race-horses; and Sam knows all about this man. They call them Touts, or Ditch-frogs, or Sky-blinkers, or half a dozen other names; but they get well paid, and they don't care. His name, or nick-name, is Tony Tonks, which he takes from some story-book, I believe. He is a very queer sort of fellow; if you saw him once, you would know him always; not a bit like any of

our folk down here. Sam says he could canter round any of his chaps, and he would try to afford him, if he did crooked work; but Tony is a costly luxury."

"Never mind the cost. Your Aunt shall pay; she has nothing to do with all her cash, except to blow out a lot of dogs, like footballs. But is this Tony to be trusted? He might be a Jack of both sides."

"That is just what he isn't. And that is how he gets double the wages of any other Tout. He puts his whole heart into anything he takes up; and yet he is cool as a weazel. He makes a point of honour of winning, Sam told me; and he would rather pay money out of his own pocket, than be beaten, whenever he takes up a job. And he is very small; he can slip in and out, while people say—'Oh, what boy was that?' But I doubt whether he would take up this. He would have made a wonderful jockey, I was told; and he rides as well as the best of them. But he loses his head, when he is put upon a horse, or he might be now making ten thousand a year. Nobody can explain such things."

"Nobody can explain anything;" my Uncle replied with his usual wisdom; "look at me.

I have been in a garden all my life, and I have kept my eyes open, and I am no fool. But if you ask what canker is in an apple-tree or pear, or blister in a peach, or silver-leaf, or shanking in grapes, or sudden death in a Moorpark, or fifty other things that we meet with every day, all I can say is—'Go and ask the men of science, and if two of them tell you the same thing, believe it.' No, my lad, we know nothing yet, though we find bigger words than used to serve the turn. Have you told young Henderson, that you would like to try this fellow, Tony Tonks?"

"No, I never thought of it, until just now, when you suggested that the villain should be watched, to find out where he goes, and all his dirty doings. It is fair play with such a deadly sneak. But for all that, I hate the thought of it."

"We must meet the Devil with his own weapons. Sam is going to be married at Ludred, I suppose."

"Yes, next Thursday. And I have promised to be there. Although it will be a bad time for me."

"Never mind, Kit. You shall have your time again. As I have told you more than once. I am an old man now, and have seen a lot of

wickedness. But I never knew it triumph in the end. Go up at once to Halliford, and get your friend to write to this fellow by the afternoon post. We might have him here to-morrow night, and settle matters with him, while we have Henderson to help us."

I was lucky enough to find Henderson at home, and he entered into our plan with zeal; for he had his own grudge with Bulwrag. But he told me that we must be prepared to part with a heap of money, if we began it; and he could not tell how long it might last. I answered that we had a good Bank to draw on, and that I should be able to repay it in the end out of my own little property, which I should insist upon doing.

"Tony will want five pounds a week, and all expenses covered; and you may put that probably at five pounds more." Sam looked as if he thought I could not afford it. "And then if he does any good, he will expect a handsome tip. And you must let him have his own head. He is the best man in England for the job, if he will take it. And perhaps he will. There is nothing on now in his line of business much, till the Leger comes on. Tony will do a good deal for me. I shall put

it as a personal favour, you know. But we won't tell him what it is, until he comes to see."

Busy as he was with his own affairs, Henderson wrote to the great horse-watcher, and receiving reply by telegraph, met him at Feltham the following afternoon; and after showing him all over his own places, brought him to supper with us at my Uncle's cottage at nine o'clock, as had been arranged in the morning. And it was as good as a play—as we express it—and better than most of the French plays now in vogue, to see my solid Uncle, with his English contempt for a spy, and strong habit of speaking his mind, yet doing his utmost to be hospitable, and checking himself in his blunt deliveries, and catching up any words that might be too honest for the convenience of his visitor. He told me afterwards that he felt like a rogue, and was afraid of sitting square to his own table.

The visitor however did not in the least appreciate these exertions, or even perceive their existence. He was perfectly contented with his own moral state, and although he said little, I could almost have believed that he regarded my good Uncle with as much

superiority, as was felt — but not shown — towards himself. And his principal ambition was to take in a good supper.

Being concerned more than all the rest in his qualities, I observed him closely, and became disappointed when he said nothing of any particular astuteness. But perhaps, like most men who have to work their brains hard, he allowed them a holiday when off duty, and cared very little what was thought of them then, if they came up to the scratch at signal. And although he said little, what he said was to the point, and he did not expend great ability in proving, as most men do, that two and two make four.

His outer man was of such puny build, that when he sat by my Uncle's elbow, it seemed as if he might have jumped into the big pocket, wherein the fruit-grower was wont to carry a hammer, a stick of string, a twist of bast, a spectacle-case full of wall-nails, a peach-knife, a pair of clips, a little copper wire, and a few other things to suit the season, according to its latest needs. Tony Tonks glanced every now and then with great curiosity at my Uncle, and at this pocket which was hanging with its weight under the arm of a curved Windsor

chair; as a fisherman likes to see his bag hang down, but only once in his lifetime has that pleasure.

But though Tony Tonks might go (more readily than the fish who won't come at all) into that pocket, Nature had provided him with compensation for his want of magnitude. There never lived a very small man yet, who was not in his own opinion big. Great qualities combine in him, of mind and soul, and even of the body for the sake of paradox; so that no one knows what he can amount to, but himself. And as the looking-glass presents us with ourselves set wrong; so the mirror of the man who weighs but half the proper weight, may exalt him to the ceiling, if he slopes it to his mind.

Tony spoke little, but he spoke with weight, and expected to be followed closely, when he gave us anything. And it became pleasant to behold my Uncle gradually forming a great opinion of him, because he was not offered much to build it on. Sam Henderson nodded very knowingly to me, and I returned it with a wink behind my Uncle Corny's head, when the pipes were put upon the table, and the Grower took the clean one he intended for

himself, and gave it (with a grunt at his own generosity) to Tonks.

"Now we all know where we are," began my Uncle, as if a puffing pipe had been the cloudy pillar; "the best thing, as I have always found in life, is for people to know what they are at, before they do it."

Tony Tonks nodded, and my Uncle was well pleased, both to have the discourse to himself, and to perceive that the visitor smoked slowly, and could dwell upon good things.

"You give us your experience and skill, for the period of one month at least if needful, for the sum of five pounds a week payable in advance, as well as travelling expenses, if required, and lodgings. You report to us by post, when there is anything to tell, and you come down at the end of every week, to let us know how you get on, and to draw your money for the next week. And you attend to nothing else, but the job you are engaged on."

"Nothing else. Never take two things in hand at once."

"And the business you undertake for us is to find out everything that can be found about the doings of Donovan Bulwrag. Where he goes, who his companions are, what messages

he receives or sends, how he employs his time, what he is up to, everything about him that is of interest to us. It seems a nasty shabby thing, but he has brought it on himself. We can't bear doing it; but it must be done."

"Nothing shabby in it," Tonks exclaimed with spirit, and a quick flash in his small gray eyes; "tricky people must be tricked."

"A man who has wronged another man," said my Uncle, putting it on a larger footing, "as that low scoundrel has wronged us, has put himself outside of all honour. You know the man very well by sight, I believe."

"And by more than sight;" answered Tony, in a voice that made us look at him. But as he offered no explanation, we did not ask him what he meant, but concluded that he had his own bone to pick with this crafty enemy.

CHAPTER III.

TOADSTOOLS.

We arranged that our watchman—as my Uncle called him, thinking it much more respectable than spy—should hire a room from our friend Mrs. Wilcox, who could help him in many ways. For she knew all the habits of the house of Bulwrag, and had useful friends in the kitchen there, and could introduce Tonks to a distant view of the adversary's mother and sisters.

All this being settled, and everybody else in good spirits about it, I fell suddenly into deep dejection, not on account of Sam Henderson's good luck, for that I rejoiced in and would not think of, but simply from dwelling on my own hard fate, and the sympathy aroused by it among all who knew me. For as time went on, I was pitied more and more, and our neighbours one and all made up their minds, that there

never had been a more unlucky fellow. And especially the women looked at me in such a way, that when I could avoid them without rudeness, it seemed to be a comfort to have business round the corner.

This began to tell upon me more and more; for as no man can see all the world for himself, but must take his view of it from other people's eyes; so even in his own affairs he finds their colour affected by the light or shade that others cast upon them. And labour as I might to think that every one was wrong, and ought to be compelled to keep his mind to his own business, yet when I had made all this most certain to myself, a frosty fog and gloom of doubt would settle on my spirits, and wrap me in a world of wonder having no straight road in it. And what with one state of mind and another, sometimes the pangs of memory, and sometimes the stings of fury, and worst of all the heavy ache of listlessness and loneliness, upon the whole it seemed less harm to be out of life than in it.

How it might have ended I know not, if it had not been for something which I took to be an accident, and of no importance to me more than any other meeting. One evening after sunset, as the days were drawing in, though

the summer was still in its power and beauty, I was taking my usual lonely walk in "Love Lane," as the young people called it. There had not been a night, whether fine or wet, from the time of my loss to this moment, when I had failed of this lonely walk, unless I was far from Sunbury. It was some little comfort to end the day in pacing to and fro where last, so far at least as knowledge went, my Kitty's footsteps must have been.

And now, when the sunset tint was gone, and the sky could be looked into like clear glass, and in the tranquillity of summer night the flutter of a leaf might almost seem to be caused by the twinkle of a star, I, the only unquiet creature—according to the laws of man—was treading the same restless round, and thinking the same endless thoughts, as when the storm of evil fortune had been fresh upon me. Wrapt in my own cares alone, and breathing only for myself—for absorbing love in small men is but selfishness by deputy, and I in all but outward form have been a small man always—here I plodded without heed of grandeur, goodness, or the will of God.

But things are strangely brought about; and any one not remembering this might laugh to

hear how I was enlarged, and for the moment more ennobled than by all the stars of heaven, through the sight of a white cotton handkerchief. A man climbed over a gate into the lane, stiffly raising one leg first, and then after a little pause the other, as if his active days were gone. And probably I should not have seen him, for all his clothes were black, unless he had carried a white handkerchief. This was conspicuous in the dark of the overhanging foliage; and it seemed to be doubled up by the corners, and bulging with some bulk inside.

"What can he have got in that?" thought I, and hastened my steps to see, although it was no concern by rights of mine.

"Good evening, Mr. Kit—excuse me, Mr. Orchardson I mean." This was said in a kind and gentle voice; and I took off my hat, for I saw that it was our Parson, the Rev. Peter Golightly, not our Vicar, who was absent for the summer, but the Curate in charge of our parish.

"What a calm and beautiful night!" he resumed; "it takes one out of one's self almost. It makes our sorrows seem so small."

He might have talked like this for an hour, without any effect of that sort on me; if he had

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not finished with a heavy sigh, in spite of all the solace of the scene. Then I knew that he referred to his own grief, which was a dark and bitter one. He had lost his wife, just before he came to us; and now it was said that his only child, a graceful girl of about fifteen, was pining away with some mysterious illness, and would take no food. And he, an old man of threescore and five, of feeble frame and requiring care, must finish his earthly course alone, poor, and forlorn, and with none to love him.

"I hope Miss Bessy is a little better," I said very softly; for I felt rebuked in my health and strength, by a grief like this.

"No, I fear not. She fancies nothing. As I came back from visiting poor Nanny Page, I saw some fine mushrooms in the footpath field, and it struck me that possibly my child would like them; though they are not very nourishing or wholesome food. But if we could get her to eat anything—and I have a special style of cooking them. But it was nearly dark when I gathered them, and I scarcely know the true from the poisonous. I was going to ask Dr. Sippets, but I fear he would forbid them altogether. You could do me a great favour, if you would. Just to look these over for me."

This I undertook with the greatest pleasure, and asked him to come to my cottage for the purpose, where we could procure a light. And I was pleased that he did not in any way attempt to "talk goody," as our people call it, nor even refer to my lonely condition; though I knew by the softness of his manner that it was present to his mind. The reverend gentleman had collected his booty in too Catholic a spirit, mingling with the true Agaric some very fine "Horse-mushrooms," and even one or two poisonous toadstools. Having packed all the good ones in a tidy punnet, which looked more enticing than his handkerchief, I carried them for him to his own door, and obtained leave to call on the morrow, and ask whether the young lady had been tempted.

My Uncle Corny was one of that vast majority of good Britons, which can never forbear the most obvious joke, even when it is least attractive. The most fastidious people in the world could scarcely call him "vulgar,"—which used to be a favourite word with them—because he could let them call him what they liked, and be none the worse for it. They might just as well blame a dog for loving liver, or a cat for believing that heaven is milk, as fall foul of my

Uncle Corny, because he ate the onions of very common jokes. He liked to make a laugh; and when he failed, he perceived that the fault was upon the other side.

"I thought of a capital thing," he told me, "when I was half awake last night, for I never sleep now as I used to do. If you go on like this, you'll have to answer to the parish for it. What right have you to change our Parson's name?"

I saw by the wag of his nose that he was inditing of some cumbrous joke; and I let him take his time about it.

"How slow you are! Can't you see, Kit, his proper name is Golightly; and you are making him go heavily. Well, never mind. I can't expect you to see anything just now. I suppose you never mean to laugh again."

"Certainly not at such stuff as that. What am I doing, to disturb him?"

"Why, you are getting into talks together, and heavy proceedings about probations, and trials, and furnaces of affliction, and all that sort of stuff, as I call it; instead of coming to have your pipe with me."

"There has not been a word of the sort;" I answered, wondering how he could be so small.

"Mr. Golightly leaves all that for the Methodists. He is a Churchman. And not only that, but he is a man of true courage, and real faith in God. If he could only give me a hundredth part of what he has, how different I should be! And he never talks about it, but I know that it is in him. Without a single word, he has made me thoroughly ashamed of the way I go on. Look at him! A poor old man, who can scarcely climb a gate, or lift a chair, and who sees his one delight in this world pining and waning to the grave before him. Yet does he ever moan and groan, and turn his back on his fellow-creatures? Not he. He sets his face to work, with a smile that may be sad, but is at any rate a pleasant one; and he gives all his time to help poor people, who are not half so poor as he is. I call him a man; and I call myself a cur."

"Come, come; that's all nonsense, Kit. I am sure you have borne your trouble well; though you have been crusty now and then. And you can't say that I have not made allowance wonderfully for you. And here you are ready to throw me over; because this man, whose duty it is, and who is paid for doing it, sets a finer example than I do! I don't call

that a Christian thing. Let him come and grow fruit, and have to sell it, and if he keeps his temper then, and pays all his hands on a Saturday night, and sets a better example than I do——"

I burst out laughing. It was very rude; for my Uncle was much in earnest. But I could not help it; and after staring at me, with a vacant countenance, he gave three great puffs of tobacco, and smiled as if he was sorry for me.

"Well, take him another bunch of grapes," he said, with true magnanimity; "I am glad that the poor maid enjoys them. And they are come down now to fifteen pence."

Thus was I taken, without deserving any such consolation, into a higher life than my own, and a very different tone of thought. The bitterness, and moody rancour, which had been encroaching on me, yielded to a softer vein of interest, and sympathy in sorrows better borne than mine. The lesson of patience was before me, told in silence and learned with love; and it went into me all the deeper, because my pores were open.

But in spite of all that, I saw no way to sudden magnanimity. It is not sensible to suppose that any man can forego his ways, and

jump to sudden exaltation, just because he comes across people of higher views than his. Women seem to compass often these vast enlargements of the heart; but a man is of less spongy fibre, if he is fit to marry them. It had been admitted by Tabby Tapscott, even in her crossest moments, that I was a "man as any woman could look up to, if she chose." And the very best of them must not be asked to do that to a man who is like themselves. And so I continued pretty stiff outside, and resolved to have my rights, which is the only way to get them.

"Here comes Tony," exclaimed my Uncle, on the following Saturday night; "time for him to show something for his money. If there is anything I call unfair, it is to pay for a thing before you get it. He will prove to his own satisfaction that he has worked it out, of course. When you were at Ludred about Sam's wedding, you should have fixed your Aunt to something. Your fifty pounds is nearly gone; and she never gave you another penny. I don't see why I should pay for it like this. And the French stuff is in the market already. What's the good of being an Englishman?"

"And what's the good of being an Englishwoman?" I answered, for I thought him too

unjust, as he had not paid a sixpence yet. "Unless she is allowed to dress sometimes, and be told that she is twenty years younger than she is. Aunt Parslow looked fit to be a bridesmaid quite. And she will come down handsomely, when she has paid her bills. She looked at her cheque-book, and she said as much as that."

"Then let her do it;" said my Uncle shortly. "I suppose this spy-fellow will expect his supper. Eat he can, and no mistake. The smaller a man is, the more he holds. You had better run down to the butcher's."

Mr. Tonks might have heard him, but he made no sign, only coming up quietly with his tall hat on, and taking a chair which stood opposite to ours; for the weather being friendly, and the summer at its height, we were sitting out of doors, beneath the old oak-tree. Then he nodded to us, put his hat upon the grass, and waited for our questions.

"Well, Tonks, what have you been up to all this time? You have sent us no letter, so I suppose you have done little."

Thus spoke my Uncle, looking at him rather sternly. I also looked at him very closely, and was surprised to find a certain strength of

goodness in his face, which I had not observed, when I first saw him. His face was thin and narrow, and his cheeks drawn in, and his aquiline nose had a twist to one side. But the forehead was high and broad, and the lips and chin full of vigour and strong resolution. And the quiet gray eyes expressed both keenness and resource.

"A thing of this kind takes a lot of time," he said; "and if you gents are not satisfied, you had better say so. I take no man's money, when he thinks it thrown away."

"Hoity, toity, man, don't be so hot," my Uncle replied, showing much more heat himself; "we have not said a word. We are waiting for you."

"I have not done much. It was not to be expected. I have cleared the ground for further work. It depends upon you, whether I go on."

"Yes, to be sure! Go on, go on. We give you your head, and we are as patient as Job. I suppose you have found out where that scoundrel is."

"Yes. And I have found out something more than that. I have struck up an acquaintance with him, and he does not know me; though

he ought, for he broke my arm, last winter; though perhaps he never saw my face. But I wore moustaches and whiskers then, and a green shade through a little kick from a horse. I know of a gambling-club he goes to, and there I meet him every night. I have put him up to a trick or two; and we are to rehearse them at his rooms to-morrow night. He is very close; but I shall gradually worm him. But I must be supplied with cash, to do it."

"We will try to arrange about that," said my Uncle; "and of course you can return it, and perhaps win some more. Gambling is a thing I detest with all my heart; and no one can ever win by it, in the end. If he did, it would do him no good. But still, it is right that the rogues who live by it should be robbed. If you pick up a pound or two there, all the better. I think you have done wonders, Tonks. But I suppose you have discovered nothing about—about the lady."

"Not a single syllable yet," he answered, looking at me, as he caught my expression; "but I believe I shall, if I have my time. What I have done is a great deal better than "shadowing" the man, as they call it. I might do that for months, and be no wiser. But I am obliged

to be very careful. So many people know me. I can never go near him where the racing people are. And I have had one very narrow shave already. But there is another thing you may be glad to know. Bulwrag is beginning to make up to a rich lady. He is not sweet upon her; but it seems that he must do it."

"The thief!" exclaimed my Uncle; "we must never allow that. The scamp would break her heart. I am determined to prevent it. I shall let her know my opinion of him. I know all the villanous lot too well. Don't be excited, Tonks. I can't stand that. Give me her name and address; and I will go with the Van myself, if necessary. I should think myself a party to it, if I did not stop it. She will soon see what I am."

"I was going to tell you, but now I had better not," Tony Tonks answered with a sly dry smile; "what good could you do, Mr. Orchardson? The lady would only laugh at you, even if she deigned to see you."

"Nobody ever laughs at me. And as for deigning to see me,—why, the Queen herself would do it, the way I should put it."

"Well, you have a good opinion of yourself. But you must keep quiet in this matter, unless

you want to spoil my little game. The lady is the Lady Clara Voucher, daughter of the Earl of Clerinhouse, a very great heiress, and not bad looking. What more he can want is a puzzle to me. But it goes against the grain with him."

"He shall never have her; he may take his oath of that," said my Uncle, bringing down his hand upon his knee, as if he were the father of the peerage.

"Well, this is a curious affair," thought I; "how can he be taking to anybody else, after having cast his eyes on Kitty?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE DUCHESS.

All these things compelled me to think about them, because they were so different from what might have been expected. When first I lost my wife, and knew that I had been robbed of her, I made up my mind for savage work, and nothing could be too wild for me. The greatest wrong that man can do to man had been done to me; for a stab to the bodily heart is better than the destruction of faith and love. But the care for my dear wife's good name, (which would have been blasted, if ever it got abroad that she had eloped with the money), as well as many other tender thoughts, had kept me quiet, and conduced to stop me from any acts of violence. And this instinct of true love proved quite right; as all will confess who care to know the end of it.

Straitened as I was with my own cares, and sometimes buried in them, I could not help trying to lift if it were but the corner of the burden imposed by Heaven upon a man a thousandfold better and more noble. The only excuse I could make to myself, for the different way in which he bore his grief, was that he was bound to do it as a Clergyman, and being so old must be getting used to it. But I knew in my heart that this was paltry stuff; and that the true reason of the difference was, that he was a large man with faith in God; while I was a little one relying upon self. There was no way before me to cure that, for no man can set up his ladder on a cloud; still it did me good to know that he had found stable support, and was stedfast upon heaven.

Mr. Golightly was not only a Christian, but a gentleman. Far as I was below his rank in life, he never let me feel the difference, either by word, or turn of manner, or even by tone of silence. He never enquired into my affairs, though no indifference prevented it; and nothing was further from his mind than the thought that he was doing good to me. Being of a nature which requires something to love, I loved this man, and never could see anything to

laugh at in him, as my Uncle Cornelius made believe to do.

I became restless if any day went by without my seeing him, and I could not sleep on my two chairs, however tired I might be, without the remembrance of his—"Good night, God bless you, Kit"—which he always gave me, in a gentle voice, and with a look which was itself a blessing. And now I had been admitted to the acquaintance of his darling; whom he loved as I loved Kitty, but with a holier sense and fear. She was lying on a horsehair sofa, in his poorly furnished room; for he was poor, as a good man is nearly always somehow. And I never shall forget the look she gave me from her weary eyes, quite as if the depth of kindness were enhanced by its want of power. And she rose upon one wasted arm, and offered me a hand just like a white kid glove, that has been drawn off.

"You have been very good to father;" she looked at my sunburnt face, as if she would like to remember it somewhere else; "and what lovely grapes you bring me! See, how greedy I have been!"

It was as much as I could do to keep my eyes from being like grape-stalks; and I tried

to drive my sorrow inwards, by thinking that all of it was wanted there. But it would not do, and I turned away.

"What she wants is outdoor air;" I said, as soon as we left the room, and her father asked me what I thought; and I said it more to hide my own distress, than from any hope at all. "Outdoor air without exercise, and with very gentle movement."

"Sims, the flyman, is very good;" her father's lips trembled as he spoke, and he tried to make a smile of it; "he knows that we cannot afford much carriage-hire, and he comes at half-price when he has nothing else to do. But since the other spring broke, she can hardly bear it. She fainted twice, the last time we went."

"But the river, the water, the Thames!" I said, almost fearing to make a suggestion so stale, "what can be more easy than the gliding of a boat? Is even that too much for her?"

"Bessy has never tried it yet," said the anxious father, pondering much; "when I was at Oxford I loved the river; but I have not found time for it for many years. And I fear it would be cold upon the water."

"It is much more likely to be too hot;" I answered, with some wonder, at the clear un-

selfishness of this man, who loved the river, yet lived upon its banks, without ever taking boat, for fear of slighting duty; "the sun strikes very strong upon the river; but after four o'clock it is delightful. I know a boat that would exactly suit her. She can lie upon the cushions in the stern. The weather is beautifully calm and warm. Will you let me try it?"

He was loth to consent without leave from Dr. Sippets, which of course was right enough; but the doctor said it was the very thing he was going to recommend that very day; and as soon as the poor girl heard of it, she would scarcely hear of any other thing. We had an old boat of our own, but it was not nice enough for her; so I went as far as Shepperton for the one of which I had spoken to him. This was a very commodious affair, and the name painted on it was *The Duchess*, obliterating the old name *Emmy Moggs;* for a genuine Duchess had been in it, while staying for her health at Walton. Phil Moggs was the owner, and he raised his price, as soon as he had painted out his good wife's name. And he thought so much of this boat now—though described by rivals as the washing-tub—that he always insisted on going with it. However, he was not

a bad sort of fellow, though belonging henceforth by his own account, to the higher aristocracy. The cheaper men called him "the Duke," and he accepted the title without ill-will.

Regardless of expense, I hired boat and him, under private agreement that Mr. Golightly should pay him half a crown, and suppose that all. And we brought the young lady in a bath-chair to the bank, and shipped her without any difficulty. And it was worth a lot of money to behold her fair young face, delicate with dreams of heaven, taking the flush of the firmer air, and gradually kindling with the joys of earth. She looked at every tree we glided past, and every fair garden upon either bank, and every feathered bend of hill and hollow, as if they were coming to her in a dream, yet so that she could make friends of them. At first her dear father clasped her hand, as if she could glide more smoothly so; but soon she became more independent, and wanted both hands, to point out her delight. Then the tears of kind pleasure came into his eyes, and he turned away, and looked at the world for himself, and thanked God for this little touch of happiness.

"Shall we rest for a minute beneath this willow?" he said, as the sun drew along the

stream, and the myriad twinkles of bright air seemed to be dancing to the silver chord of waves; then we slid into the silence of a cool arcade, and I said—

"It is high time for Moggs to have some beer."

Mindful of this prime need of every British waterman, I had brought a little stone jar from my Uncle's tap; and thinking that the savour of this fine beverage might not be agreeable to our fair freight, I landed on the island, with a wink to "the Duke;" and he very kindly followed me. The Pastor knew well that his flock must be fed, and he extended this knowledge to the neighbouring parish.

There was lemonade and strawberries for the weaker vessels; and while they remained afloat, and entered into these, Moggs and I sat behind a bush, and considered what was good for us.

"I suppose you don't often come Sunbury way;" I said, just to lend a little tongue to tooth-work; for I had brought some bread and a hunk of bacon.

"Nobs goes mostly up the river, Chertsey, and Laleham, and the Mead, and that likes," Mr. Moggs replied, with his knife upon the bone. "Ain't been your way, pretty nigh three months."

"Ah, but you had a nice time then. Very fine ale at the *Flower-pot*, Moggs."

"Well, so there be; but quite as good nigher home. And I likes my drop of beer, without no water in it. Here's your good health, Mr. What's your name."

"Thank you, Moggs; and the same to you. But I don't understand about water in your beer."

"Well, did ever you see a young 'ooman cry enough to fill a bucket, let alone a boat? I pretty nigh wanted one of them tarpaulins. Just lost her Daddy, the old man said to me. But he told me not to speak of it; no more I did. But I found out arterwards all about it. Seems she come from Molesey, though I took her t'other side."

"From Molesey? I know a good many of the people there. The only man who died there this summer, to my knowledge, was an old bachelor by the name of Powell. What was this young woman's name?"

"Watson, or Wilson, I won't be certain which. Never mind; I dare say she's all right by now. The more they takes on at first, the sooner they gets shut."

"But you took her on our side of the river,

as you said. Did you go to fetch her? What day was it? What was she like? Who sent you for her? Where did you land her? How came you——

"Look here, Mr. What's your name. You hires my boat, and you hires me to row; but not to go on about other people's business."

"But it may be my own business, Philip Moggs. And you may get into desperate trouble, by refusing to tell me all you know of it."

"Not a bit feared of that," the old man answered; "I've a-knowed hundreds get into trouble with too much clacking, but never one the other way."

He shut up his mouth, and looked like an old villain of a horse I had seen at Sam Henderson's, who had pits above his eyes, and ears that stuck back like a gun-cock, and a nose that was as wiry as a twisted toasting-fork. This was a man who would whistle on his own nails to warm them, but not to warn another man from going down a weir-pool.

"Well," I said, "never mind; I don't suppose it matters"—for I was able to master my manners now, after three months of endurance; "only somebody has a bit of money upon

something; and you might cut in for it, if you gave a hand. But I'll be bound you know nothing about it, after all. You fellows, who are always on the water, dream all sorts of stuff, just as I did this afternoon."

"Then, Mister, I'll just keep my dreaming to myself. I did hear of something queer down your way. But least said, soonest mended. Time to be shoving off again."

On the homeward row, I did my best to drive out of my mind all thought of this ancient mariner, and his story. And he feigned not to be thinking of it; though I caught his wrinkled eyelids dropping suddenly at the sudden glances which I cast upon him. He was watching me narrowly, when I looked away; and I thought it likely that he would land again when he had discharged us, and try to learn all about me in the village. For we at Sunbury knew but little of the Shepperton people at that time, looking on it rather as a goose-green sort of place, benighted, and rustic, and adverse to good manners. Shepperton, without equal ground, despised us, as a set of half-Cockneys, and truckling for the money of London, which they very nobly contemned, because they got so little of it. If anything exciting came to pass

at Sunbury, these odd people shrugged their shoulders, and talked about Bow Street, and Newgate, and the like; as if they belonged to Middlesex, and we to London. However, there can be no doubt which is the finer village.

I was much dissatisfied with myself, when I came to think of it, for allowing as I did this boatman's story so to dwell upon my mind, that even the fair invalid in the stern lost many little due attentions. But happily she fell fast asleep, being sweetly lulled by the soft fine air, and the dreamy melody of waters. Her long eyelashes lay flat in the delicate hollows of her clear white cheeks, where a faint tinge of rose began to steal, like the breath of a baby angel.

"How beautiful she looks!" I whispered to her father, as he gazed at her; and he answered—"Yes. How can I bear it? It is the beauty of a better world."

But he was in livelier mood about her, when we took her gently home; and she rose from the chair with a rally of strength, and he said, "Well, Bessy, how do you feel now?"

"As if I wanted a good tea," she answered; "and as if I never could thank this gentleman for the pleasure he has given us."

I wondered whether in trying ever so feebly

to give pleasure, I might have won, without earning, some great good for myself; and off I went (after proper words) to follow the course of the *Duchess*.

In a minute or two, I had gained a spot which commanded the course of the river; and there I perceived that the unmistakable Moggs, instead of hastening home, was resting on his oars to watch the bank, and make sure that no one was watching him. I slipped into a quiet niche, which made me think of Kitty; for here I had seen her surveying the flood, in the days of my early love for her. It had been a happy place that day; would it help me once again?

Presently Moggs made up his mind, if haply it had been wavering; and pulling into the evening shadows sought a convenient landing-place. Then he fastened the *Duchess* to a stump, and stiffly made his way towards that snug little hostelry the *Blue Anchor*, favoured by most of our waterside folk.

"That will do," thought I; "he has conquered his contempt of Sunbury. He is going to pick up all he can about me. There must be something in it. And now for the Molesey story."

Without delay I returned to our village, and

through it hastened to the landing, where our ancient boat was kept. There was no fear of meeting Moggs down here, for he was a good half-mile above. Pulling leisurely down stream, I began to think how stupid we had been in our enquiries, at least if my present idea proved correct. But the Policemen, to whom we had entrusted the first part of the search, must bear the blame of this stupidity. They had not failed to make enquiry among the boatmen, and along the river; although their attention had been directed chiefly to the roads and railway. But they had assumed throughout that the fugitive must have gone towards London, and as regarded the Thames, they had only cared to enquire much down stream. Up the river there was as yet no railway, and no important road; and with their usual density, they had searched but very vaguely hereabout.

At Molesey I had friends who knew every item of what happened there; and they soon convinced me that no young woman weeping for her father's recent loss was likely to have quitted that good village, east or west, at the time in question. Therefore Phil Moggs had been deceived, whether by his passenger or others, as to that part of the story.

I was greatly surprised to find how little the general mind of Molesey seemed to be concerned about my case. Few seemed even to have heard of it; and the few who did know something knew it all amiss, or had put it so, by their own imaginations. Indeed I could scarcely have guessed that the story, as recounted there, had aught to do with my poor humble self. Even Uncle Corny—great in fame at Sunbury, and even Hampton,—was but as a pinch of sand flung from a balloon, to these heavy dwellers in Surrey!

CHAPTER V.

CRAFTY, AND SIMPLE.

Does it lighten a man's calamities, or does it increase their burden, to know that they are spread abroad and talked of by his fellow men? No man wishes to be famous for his evil fortune; and as for pity, he is apt to be alike resentful, whether it is granted or denied. But that is quite another point. Without a bit of selfishness, and looking at their own interests only, I certainly had a right to complain that an outrage which must move the heart of every honest husband, and thrill the gentler bosom of his faithful wife, had scarcely stirred a single pulse at Molesey; just because the river ran between us. None of the papers (except one that we subscribed to, at an outlay of four and fourpence per annum) had taken up my case with any fervour; as sometimes they do, when there is nothing in it, like a terrier shaking a

skull-cap. This depends on chance; and all chances hitherto had crossed their legs against me, so that I could bring forth no sound counsel.

When I told my Uncle of my last suspicion, and that I could go no further with it, because of the stubbornness of Phil Moggs, he became so enraged that I saw he was right.

"What!" he exclaimed—"that old hunks dare to refuse any further information! I wonder you did not take him by the neck, and hoist him clean over the tail of his *Duchess*. No doubt you would have done it without the young lady. He would never dare to try it on with me. Why I knew him when he dug lob-worms at the Hook. He has forgotten me, I daresay. Well, I'll remind him. You shall pull me up there to-morrow morning. One way or the other, we'll crack his eggshell. I could never have believed it of him."

It did not concern me to enquire; but so far as I could make out what my Uncle meant, he was not at all pleased with Mr. Moggs for having got on in the world so well. No man can satisfy his friends in that respect; unless he makes so big a jump that he can lift them also, and even so he never does it to their satisfaction.

"To think of that fellow," my dear Uncle grumbled, all the way to Shepperton, "owning half a dozen boats, and calling one of them the *Duchess!* Why, I gave him an old pair of breeches once, that he might not be had up for indecency. And now he calls my nephew, 'Mr. What's your name!' Do you know who his wife was? No, of course you don't. But I do. Why, she was in the stoke-holes at old Steers', the pine-apple grower at Teddington. And no one knew whether she was a boy or a girl, with a sack and four holes in it, for her arms and legs. But what a lot of money they made then! He sold all his pines at five guineas apiece to George the Fourth, and sometimes he got the money. Ah, there will never be such days again. You must scrimp and scrape, and load back from the mews, and pay a shilling, where they used to pay you to take it. But here we are! Let him try his tricks with me."

Unluckily my Uncle got no chance of terrifying Mr. Moggs, as he intended. We landed at a very pretty slab-faced cottage, covered with vines and Virginia creepers, and my Uncle began to shout—"Moggs, Phil Moggs!" quite as if he were a Thames-Commissioner. But no

Moggs answered, nor did any one appear, till my Uncle seized a boat-hook, and thundered at the door. Then a very respectable looking woman, with a pleasant face and fine silver hair, came and asked who we were, and showed us in. She seemed to know my Uncle very well, though he was not at all certain about her.

"Is it possible, Ma'am, after all these years," he began in his best manner, "that I see the young lady I once had the pleasure of knowing as Miss Drudger?"

"You see the old woman, who was once that girl," she answered, as she offered him a chair; "ah, those indeed were pleasant days!"

I thought of the stoke-hole, and could well have believed that my Uncle had been romancing, if I had ever known him capable of that process. But she very soon reassured me.

"I worked hard then, and I had no worries. But I have known plenty of care since then. I suppose you came to see my husband, sir. Is there any business I can do? He started for his holiday this morning. The doctor has been ordering him change of air; and at last I persuaded him to go. He is gone for a month or so, to Southsea. We have a daughter there doing very well indeed. She is married to a

large boat-builder. My eldest son George sees to everything here, now his father has taken him partner. But I keep the books, and can take any order, just as if Mr. Moggs was at home."

It seemed rather strange that she should speak like this, quite as if she expected some enquiry. I looked at my Uncle, and saw that the same idea was passing through his mind.

"Thank you, Mrs. Moggs," he said, as if he wanted time to think; "I fear that we must not trouble you. But are you in the habit of entering orders?"

"All the more important ones we do. At least for the last year or two we have. It was through a curious thing that happened, and we were nearly getting into trouble."

"You cannot be expected to show your books to strangers. I wanted to ask one little question. Moggs would have answered it with pleasure. But of course, as he is not at home——"

"That need not make any difference, sir. Everything we do is plain and open. We don't make a practice of showing our books. But if there is any particular entry you wish to enquire about, I shall be glad to help you. That is, if you can tell me the right date."

Again we were surprised at her alacrity. But after a few words, my Uncle mentioned the 15th of last May, as the date of the occurrence he wished to be informed about.

"Let us look at the day book," she answered very promptly; "that will show everything we did then. It is in the next room. You shall see it, in a minute."

While she was gone, my Uncle leaned both hands upon his stick, and looked at me. "This is all gammon, Kit," he whispered; "never mind; you watch her."

The old lady soon reappeared with the book, which was nothing but a calendar interleaved.

"You see I have learned business since you knew me, Mr. Orchardson," she said as she turned back to the date; "Moggs isn't half such a scholar as I am; but George is a great deal better. Why, he can do decimals, and fractions, and all that. You don't mind my turning back the edge of the leaf. Our prices, of course, are our own concern. We don't seem to have done much on the day you speak of."

"Very little indeed. Much less than usual; though the day, if I remember right, was beautifully clear and sunny. There seem to have been only three boats out, and all of them

up the river. Your husband spoke of coming down our way; but I suppose it was some other time. And of fetching a lady, who cried all the way."

"Then it must have been some other day. It could never have been on that day, you may be certain; or here it would be in black and white. But he never remembers when he did a thing; and he often mixes up two years together. A lady who cried? Why, let me see; I did hear something about it. Was she in deep mourning, Mr. Orchardson?"

"Not in mourning at all; but a grey summer dress, and a short cloak, or jacket, or whatever you call it, braided in front and scolloped round the bottom. And a very beautiful face with blue eyes, like the colour of the sky in settled weather—oh, but she may have cried them out, so you must not go by that, so much. And she had a pretty way of putting up one hand——"

"Shut up," I said, for who could stand all this? And Mrs. Moggs looked at me, as if she was so sorry.

"Oh, then it must be some one different altogether. The young party I heard of was about a year ago, and they did say she was going to her father's funeral, whether that day

or the next, I won't be certain. My poor Moggs begins to get queer in the head, from being so much on the water, no doubt. He is right about most things, and you may take his word for untold gold, Mr. Orchardson. Such a man of his word never lived, I do believe. Sometimes I say it is unnatural, and he ought to try to break himself; for if every one was like him, where would business be? But about days and months, he is wrong more than right, even when he have been to church and heard the psalms. No, no, sir; he have put you in the wrong boat altogether. It can't have been any of our people."

"You are sure to know best;" said my Uncle, looking at her, in a very peculiar way of his, which was apt to mean—"You are a liar;" and she seemed to know well what was meant by it. "Mrs. Moggs, we are much obliged to you. Remember me to your worthy husband" —he laid a little stress on the adjective—"as soon as he comes back from Southsea. Or rather when you join him there. What station do you find most convenient?"

"Woking, sir; there are others nearer. But that is the first where all trains stop, without you go back to Surbiton. 'Tis a long drive to

Woking; but they will soon come nearer, according to what I hear of it. How they do cut up the country, to be sure! They are talking of a lot of cross-lines already. But the river is the true line, made by the Lord, and ever so much more pleasant."

"So it is, Mrs. Moggs; and quite fast enough for me, when it isn't frozen over, as it was last winter. Ah, you must have had a bad time then! But I am glad to have found you so flourishing. Good-bye, and we are very much obliged to you."

"Oh, the liar!" he cried, as we shot out of hearing. "Put a beggar on horseback—it is the truest saying. Here comes a boat of theirs, by the colour! Hold hard a moment, Kit; I want to ask a question."

Easing oars, we glided gently past a light boat fitted for double sculling, with only one young fellow in it, perhaps an apprentice.

"Young man," said my Uncle; "we want to know the name of your best doctor here in Shepperton. Your governor is an old friend of mine. What's the name of the one he goes to?"

"He!" cried the young fellow, balancing his sculls; "he never been to no doctor in his life.

Don't look as if he wanted one, do he? Oh, I wish I was as tough as the old bloke is."

"What do you think of that, Kit? Pretty solid, don't you think? What a bushel of lies we have had from that old Emmy! 'Jemmy' she was called, till she turned out a girl, and then they took the J off. Such things don't happen in these schooling days; and much good they have done with them! That thief of a Moggs has cut away, you see, through what he heard last night in Sunbury. They'd lynch him there, if they knew he had a fist in it. Now one thing is quite clear to me. Your dear Kitty was taken in a boat, to Shepperton, or somewhere up the river; and Moggs was paid well for doing it, and to hold his tongue about it afterwards. Most likely he did not bring the *Duchess*, but a lighter and swifter boat, perhaps the one we met. It is useless to ask any of his fellows; you may be sure he never let them know of it. And it would have been dark by the time he took her. He spoke of an old man, you told me, when he let out what has put us up to this. Could that Downy have made himself into an old man?"

"He could make himself into almost anything; but never so completely, as to cheat my

Kitty. It must have been some one he sent, and not himself. She would never have gone with the scoundrel himself."

"No, she was much too sharp for that. What lies can they have told, to make her cry so? It is the d—dest plot I ever heard, or read of. And not a word from her, all this time! If she had been alive, she would have found a way to write. Whatever she might believe you had done, she never would have been so cold-blooded to her Kit. That is the darkest point of all. I know what women are. Even her step-mother would scarcely have been so relentless. And Kitty was the softest of the soft to any one she cared for. I fear that you must make up your mind to the worst that can have happened, my dear boy."

"I will do nothing of the sort," I answered, although I had often tried to do it; "and just when we have hit upon a fresh track, Uncle! *Nip* is in the stable. Can I have him? I shall start for Woking Road, this very afternoon. It can do no harm, if it does no good. And I never could sit still, and let it stop just as it is."

"Very well; and I will telegraph for Tony Tonks to come down by the time that you

return. We are bound to let him know of this last turn of the mystery."

To this I agreed; and as soon as we got back, I saddled the young horse *Nip*, and rode by way of Walton Bridge to Woking, feeling as I went that I would almost rather know the worst, than live on in this horrible suspense.

Woking Road Station was a very different place from what it is now, and of much less importance. Where a busy town stands now, created by the Railway, and mainly peopled by it, there were in those days but a few sad cottages in an expanse of dark furze and lonely commons. Very poor sandy land, and black patches where the gorse had been fired, and one public-house, called of course the *Railway Hotel*, and large sweeps of young fir-plantations were its chief features then, and the shabby Station looked like a trunk pitched from the Line.

There were two dirty flies, like watchmen's boxes, one with the shafts turned up, and the other peopled by a horse, who had been down upon his knees, and was licking the flies off at his leisure. The driver was sitting on a log in the distance, cutting bread and cheese, and sipping something from a tin, which appeared to have submitted to the black embrace of bonfires.

Perceiving that this was a crusty old fellow, of true British fibre, and paid by the day, which relieved him from restless anxiety for work, I approached him as nearly as I could in his own vein.

"They don't seem to be very busy here just now. But I suppose your old nag can go along when he likes. How much do you charge to Shepperton?"

"Shepp'ton, Shepp'ton? Never heard of no such place. Which way do it lie, governor?"

"Well, you had better ask," I said very craftily, as I fancied; "some of your mates will be sure to know. Some of them must have been there before now. They can tell you how far it is."

"None of them at home this afternoon," the lazy rogue answered, as he took another mouthful; "better ask Station-master. Like enough, he knows."

"He has nothing to do with you. And I want to know what the fare is. Look here, I'll stand you a pint at the bar, if you will just come up, and find out what it is. Some of your mates must have been as far as that, to take people for the pike-fishing. Shepperton is a great place for that."

"Very well, come along. But what do you want a cab for, when you've got your own horse, and a good un' too?"

"Stick to your own business," I answered gruffly; and that tone seemed to have more charm for him, as happens very often with ill-conditioned men; "you are on your legs now, try to keep them moving."

"Gent wants to know fare to Shepperton;" he shouted through the precincts of the bar into the stable-yard. "Any of you chaps been there lately? Governor gone up to have a snooze." He illustrated that point with a genial wink.

"Why, Tom been there, not so very long agone," said a little old man who was washing a double curb under the pump, and twisting out the grime with his thumb-nails; "or if it wasn't Tom, it was Joe—Joe Clipson, so it was. And a long job it were. I had to stop up for him. Thought something must have happened—he were gone such a time."

"Ah, but perhaps he went with a fishing party," I said as indifferently as I could; "when people go fishing they won't be hurried. Come in and have a glass of beer yourself, my friend."

"Well, no. I never see'd no rods, nor baskets, nor nothing of that sort, so far as I remember.

But he did say something about waiting for a boat. Thank'e, sir, thank'e; here's your good health."

"How long ago was it? And who went with him?" My hand began to shake a little, do what I would. For I seemed to be on the track at last, where no one was likely to be bribed into lying.

"Well, I don't know justly, for I worn't here when he went; and when he come back, he had been to Station first, and I were that sleepy that I didn't care to hearken, nor he to gab much, for that matter; but I know he said something about a young femmel. And how long agone? Why, let me see. Must 'a been about time for sowing scarlet-runners, for I mind my little grand-darter was playing with them, pointing out the speckles, and no two quite alike, a thing as I never took no heed on; and I must 'a been shelling of them for her mother."

"What time do you generally sow scarlet-runners here? Not, I suppose, till all chance of frost is over."

"Well, sir, generally about third week in May month. There is a lucky day, I know—birthday of Saint Somebody. Rabbit me if I

can tell his name—the chap as took the Devil by the nose and ma'le him holler. Blest, if I shouldn't 'a liked to see that though. Wouldn't you, Bill? What a spree it must 'a been!"

"I can't remember anything about those saints. Our Parson isn't one to insist upon them. But the one that did that, was called 'Dunstan,' I believe. 'Dunstan,' does that sound like it?"

"Why, it is the very ticket!" he exclaimed, with a clink of his pewter on the slate slab, made up to look like marble. "Bill, you know that's the day for putting scarlet-runners in?"

"Was it him as was going in the cab, to what you call it?"

"No, no, Bill. You never had no eddication. They used to teach us better in the times gone by. 'Twas three, or four days before his time. Fetch a Prayer-book, Miss; and then I'll prove it."

The young lady in the bar, who had been looking at us queerly, tossed her head, as if to say—"What fools these men are!" Then she swept the money out of reach, and disappeared. Presently she came back, with an ancient Prayer-book; and my old friend, after spitting on his fingers, turned over the leaves of the

Calendar, and shouted—"Here it is! I could 'a sworn to it, from Sunday-school. May 19th. St. Dunstan's Day!"

He put his thumb upon the place, and made a long-abiding mark; and I never shall forget again St. Dunstan's Day. Those Board schools never teach such useful things as that. And at grammar-school we only kept the best of the Apostles.

"Where is Joe Clipson to be found?" I asked. "Surely he could tell us all about it. I will give a sovereign, to know who came in his cab, that night, from Shepperton."

All who had gathered for that great discussion looked at me with astonishment and fear. And I saw that I had made a wrong move altogether. For nothing shuts up country mouths so sharply, as the hovering in the air of a thing that may prove criminal. At the same time, I saw that deep interest was stirred; and I fancied, very naturally, that it must be in my favour.

"Can't say when Joe will be at home;" said my old friend. "He have gone to Knapp Hill with a gent, to see the trees. When they gets among they, they never comes back in a hurry. Might be nine o'clock afore he comes home."

I looked at my watch, and saw that I must start at once, if I meant to be at home in time to meet Tony Tonks. And it struck me, that he would be much more capable of going through with the enquiries here, than I, who had already made a muddle of it, by putting questions too point-blank. So I tried to put on a careless manner.

"Well, we won't say any more about it now. Only I should like to know what fish they caught; or whether they weighed in at the Club with what they bought. If we think it worth while to go on with this, we can send a boy over, to hear Joe's account. It doesn't concern any one except ourselves. But we don't like to be beaten by the silver hook. There is a rare fish at Shepperton, that nobody can catch."

They looked at me, as if they could not quite accept this turn; and there was much disappointment on the Barmaid's face; for, with a woman's instinct, she had scented a romance. But without another word, I jumped into the saddle, and was soon upon the furzy commons, full of prickly wonderings.

CHAPTER VI.

A POCKETFUL OF MONEY.

"We are on the straight road now," said Tonks, as soon as he had heard my story; "and jigger me if we don't hunt her down. But luck can give five stone to skill, whether the course be straight or round. I have done all I know; but you beat me in a canter, just by getting the inside turn. But unless I am out of it altogether, you may trust me to fetch up by and by. I must find out who that old chap was. It could not be Downy himself, you think. Not likely that she would have gone with him. Well, now you want to hear what I have done; and I think it leads to something.

"I am bound to be terrible leary, you see, for he is uncommon wide-awake. If he had spent all his life in the sharpest stables, he could hardly have been more up to snuff. He

never believes a single word a fellow says, until he has been round it to know the reason. I can't abide that sort of thing myself, for it gives such a lot of trouble on both sides. If he asked you what o'clock it was, and you looked at your watch and told him, he'd place no faith in it, unless he saw the hands; and even then he would doubt whether you had not shifted them, on purpose to mislead him."

"Such a rogue should be knocked on the head," said my Uncle; "and I wish I had the doing of it."

"It makes everybody hate him, although his manner is not rough. He never seems to think it worth his while to take offence at people. But they would rather have that, than what he does. Old Pots is popular compared to him; because Pots hates his enemies. But this man goes on as if they were not worth hating. And that has made me doubt sometimes, why he has done this; and sometimes whether he has done it at all."

"If he has not done it, it can only be the Devil," my Uncle broke in with some anger; "I am not superstitious, but the Devil might be vexed by Professor Fairthorn's kick-me-jigs, and run off with his daughter, just to dig him in

the ribs. By George, I never thought of that before!"

"And I hope you won't think of it again," I said, in great haste that the idea might not go into his mind, for it would be hard work to get it out again; "I should hope you know better, Uncle Corny! Would the Devil think of paying such a price as Phil Moggs gets, and hire a four-wheeler to Woking Road Station?"

"You are right, Kit. He will have full value for his money; and he never could have stood the smoke I made. He gets too much of that at home. But Tonks says now that he doubts if Bulwrag did it! What are we coming to? Are we all to start again, as if we had never spent twopence over it? Tonks has been with him a deal too much. When two fellows get together so, they can't smell one another."

"I judge just the same as if I never saw him. He isn't one to get over a fellow with his looks, nor his manner neither. Mr. Orchardson, you are quite wrong there. I go by observation, and nothing else."

"And what has come of your observations?" My Uncle still despised Mr. Tonks, and he hated to be told that he was wrong, especially when I heard it.

"A good deal," said Tonks, leaning back in his chair and collecting his ideas; "a good deal, if you place confidence in me; without which I act for nobody. I don't pretend to be any wonder. But when I take a man's money, I am true to him. I have plenty of other jobs I can take to. Throw me over, if you choose, and have done with it."

"No, Tony Tonks, we will not do that. I believe that you are doing all you know; and I am a reasonable man. Now tell us all that you have to tell."

"Well, there isn't very much, but it may come to something more, especially with what you have just found out. The worst of it is that he is getting shy of me, and I dare not say things as I did. I told him that I wanted to run down, to take stock of Henderson's place down here, and I asked him if he knew the neighbourhood, and whether we should take a trap and run down together. If I could get him to that, I might pick up a lot of things, in a careless and casual way, you know. But he was much too fly for any game of that sort; and it almost seemed to me as if he smelled a rat. Then I got on to him about the scientific codgers, thinking to lead up to the old Professor

and the cruise he is going on about the bottom of the sea, and the place for laying cables, and a lot of things like that. But that wouldn't serve; and so I tried another lay. We were talking of old Pots, and I said, 'Oh, by the by, was it true that the old fool was sweet upon some girl, some girl with a lot of money, who pitched him over?' And he said, 'What a joke! I should like to hear of that. Tell us the story, Bowles, if you know it.' Bowles is the name he knows me by, you see; for it would not do for me to turn up as Tonks.

"In fact I got no hold upon him, as I thought I should have done; for he knows how to make people useful and no more; and I saw that he would drop me as soon as he had learned all the little useful things I know at cards and pool. Of course I was not swell enough for him to introduce me to his 'family circle,' as the ladies call it. And as for getting him to take a drop too much, and then working him skilfully, as can be done with most fellows,—well, I am pretty tough, but if I took the water and he the brandy, I believe I should be drunk before he was. His head is too big for any barrel to upset it.

"I was pretty near despairing, I can tell you,

Mr. Orchardson, though I never have been beaten yet, and don't want to begin it; when a little bit of accident, the merest casual accident, put me further forward than a month of work might do. You may be pretty sure, without my saying, that my appearance is not distinguished enough—although I have gone arm in arm with bigger nobs than he is, and real gentlemen some of them—but not swell enough to be seen in Downy Bulwrag's company, in Piccadilly, or the Park, or high and mighty places. No no, not for Joe, as the Poet quotes it.

"But he is not at all above allowing me the honour of his society, when I can be of service to him, and no one is likely to say—'Who's that?' And there is one particular house of his—never mind where, that has nothing to do with it—at which he always likes to have me, and treats me quite as his honoured friend. And there we were on Monday night, tickling the pigeons, as you might say, which is only what they expect of us. He can beat me now in my own inventions, not from any superior skill, but because he is the coolest hand ever seen, and nothing puts him out of tune.

"He had won all along the board that night, and his pockets were full of money; but in-

stead of being up, as a decent fellow would be, he took all his luck in a cold-blooded way, just as if it were nothing to what he deserved. That is never the right way to get any more. You must never do that, Mr. Orchardson."

"Sir, I never gamble; and I want no lessons." My Uncle spoke severely; he thought it due to me to do so.

"It is too late in life for you to begin," Tonks proceeded affably; "and your hands are too hard, Mr. Orchardson. But as I was saying, we came down the stairs, and slipped out very quietly. It was one of those little streets off Soho, where a man who knows London like the lines of his own hand may lose himself in half a minute, by one wrong turning. The night was very dark, and all the publics shut up long ago, and not a light was to be seen, except a dull lamp here and there. But we were quite used to this sort of thing, and felt no sort of fear, though we knew that we were passing through a den of robbers; and a man who has a lot of money in his pockets is inclined to fancy somehow that every stranger knows it.

"Suddenly, as we went by a narrow reeking archway, a fellow sprang out of it immediately behind us. Before I could turn, I heard a

crash, and there he lay, sent backward by a heavy blow from Bulwrag's fist. I thought that he was killed, for the blow had been tremendous; such as I have seen, when they meant business in the Prize-ring. But luckily for him, the fellow wore a hard-rimmed hat, which lay behind him doubled up, while he rolled over, gasping.

"'Not much got out of that,' said Downy, looking at his knuckles; 'the sooner we slope the better, Bowles; or there will be a rumpus.'

"'We can't go, before we see whether you have killed him. You hit him hard enough to kill an ox,' I answered.

"'Killed myself more likely. Just look at my hand. The fellow can't be hurt much. What had he on his hat-front? Don't pick him up. He'll be better where he is.'

"But seeing no one up or down the street, I disobeyed him, and drew the stunned man into the shadow of the archway, and set him with his head against the bricks, while Bulwrag showed much more concern about his hat.

"'Here it is—a metal thing! I shall keep it. Put his hat on again, Bowles; and let him meditate. We don't want to cut a shine at Bow Street. Let's be off!'

"I was rising to go, for I hate the Police-courts, and the man was evidently coming round, and could do very well without us. But before we could leave him, he stretched out his hand, and said, 'Captain, Captain, for God's sake stop a minute. I have got something for you most important. I didn't go to rob you, but to tell you something.'

"You may be sure that I was pretty wide awake at this; but of course I took care not to show it. And I saw by a shadow on the line of wall that Bulwrag had raised one hand, probably to his lips.

"'Right!' said the man, who was on his legs now, but sidled away into a darker place; 'let the other gent go. I was to tell you by yourself. I daren't come to your place, but you must come to mine.'

"'Out with it! I never keep any secrets, Bulwrag replied, just to humbug me. 'Unless it concerns other people, and then —— Well perhaps, Bowles, you wouldn't mind going to your den. Stop, let me speak to you a moment outside.'

"He took me away, while the man stopped there; and I saw that his object was to prevent me from finding out any more about that fellow.

I was forced to let him have his way that far, and to play a waiting game with him.

"'Some bosh or other,' he whispered roughly; 'I think I know who the fellow is, and all about it. A gamekeeper's daughter down in Hampshire—always wanting money. Stop, you may as well take most of this, for fear of my being too soft-hearted. There, leave me five; that's as much as I can spare. Good night! Very much obliged. See you to-morrow."

"'You had better mind what you are about,' I said; 'he owes you a grudge, and you are in a slummy part, you know. I'll come with you, if you like, and wait outside.'

"'You had better not wait at all. I am apt to mistake people, as you have seen already?'

"This was a threat; and as such I took it, walking off with a dignity which must have vexed him. However, as soon as I was round the corner, I slipped a pair of rubber socks, that I always carry with me, over my boots, and put myself on duty in other ways; so that if he met me in the shadow, or even ten yards from a lamp, he would have little chance of knowing me. And in less than two minutes I was back again; not in the archway of course, but at a

place from which I could make out part of what was going on there. For I knew that there was something up quite out of the common way with him. Now how did I know that? Can either of you tell me?"

"Why, of course, by his knocking that fellow down," my Uncle replied sagaciously; "that was a bit of by-play, I suppose."

"Not it. That was all done, bone fiddles—as we say. I knew it by the pile of cash he gave me to hold for him. Oh, he is a deep file, and all there at any moment. He had clearly formed a low opinion of your humble servant, and thought that I should bolt with all the rhino, and be seen no more. And it could be no trifle that made him risk the sum of five and forty pounds."

"Forty-five pounds!" I exclaimed; "how strange! Why, that was the very sum"—— But here I stopped, for I did not wish to go into that question with him.

"Yes, forty-five pounds, when I came to count it. I could not tell how much it was, at the moment; but I felt that it was a tidy lump of cash, and I jumped at his motive in handing it to me. But he reckoned altogether without his host there. Well, when I came back, there

they were, still at it. I could not hear a word of what they said, for I was forced to keep my distance. But I guessed that the skunk would take him somewhere, from what he had said beforehand, and then my wits would come into play. And sure enough he did, for in about two minutes they both came out, and looked up and down the street, to make sure that they were not followed. Seeing no one, they set off, at a good quick step, and I took the right style to be after them.

"They turned so many corners, and went through so many alleys, that no other man in the world could have kept them in sight, as I did, without blundering on them. We passed through many places I knew nothing of; but at last I stowed them in a quiet little den, not very far from Drury Lane. Here the fellow went down a steep narrow staircase, and knocked at a door that was like a cellar-flap. Downy stopped outside; which I thought was very wise of him, while the other went in, and for some time disappeared. But Downy came back to the entrance for fresh air, or perhaps to be certain that he was not watched. And I gave myself up for lost; but most luckily an empty truck or barrow stood against the wall, and I

just slipped under it in time. I could have touched him with my hand, but the place was very dark; and he went back without twigging me.

"I have had many narrow shaves, but none to beat that. He would have killed me with a blow, and in a hole like that, I should soon have been under the flagstones. I had no time to be in a funk till it was over; but then I began to shiver horribly, and my nerves were not fit to be trusted any more.

"I knew this; and thinking of it made them worse, for I have a wife and seven children to look after. All I cared for now was to get away, for I had run the chap to earth, and could put my hand upon him.

"There was no chance of overhearing any of their talk, even if they had any; and if they once discovered me, even though I might escape, there would be no chance of learning more. I could find the hole again, for I had seen 'Coke Yard' daubed with a tar-brush on a patch of whitewash, and wherever I have once been I can always go again. So when Bulwrag turned back towards the door, I made ready to slip round the corner.

"But before I could do so, I heard the door

creak, and the fellow with the broken hat came out again. I heard him say—'Now, you'll believe me, Captain. I'd be glad of the price of a new hat, afore you go.' What it was he gave to Downy, I could hardly see, but it looked like a packet of papers, or letters, or something done up in paper. Downy gave him something, and he said—'That all? Ain't much for such news;' and then Downy gave him more. 'Daren't come to your place. You come here,' he says, 'if you want any more—say next Saturday night; ask for Migwell Bengoose, and say *Cluck*.' That was the name so far as I could catch it. But I was bound to be off, for Bulwrag was coming. And you may depend upon it that I did not stop to chat with him."

CHAPTER VII.

NOT IN A HURRY.

We were all pretty sure that this discovery of Tony's concerned us deeply, and might lead to something, if followed up at once with luck and skill. But we thought it more important that he should go first to Woking Road, and enquire further into the story of Joe Clipson's cab, which he was sure to do much better than myself; for he could make himself look like a brother cabman, without any trouble.

He had little more to tell us about the Coke Yard yet, for he had to feel his way very tenderly there, and must wait for opportunities. And Bulwrag (who was never very sweet of temper, though, unlike his mother, he could curb himself) had been more like a bear than a cultivated Christian, since he got that cut across his knuckles. As our sympathies were not with the sufferer, Tony made us laugh by his

description of the want of resignation in a case so trifling.

"Here it is;" cried Bulwrag, after hopping round the room, as soon as his poultice began to draw; "look at this scurvy Saint! He is made of copper. Why the devil couldn't he have a Saint made of gold?"

Tonks replied that perhaps the individual with the hat could not afford a golden Saint to sit upon the brim; and the copper perhaps had done him a much better turn than gold, both in saving his head from the crushing blow, and avenging it on the smiter. For the wound looked very angry, and it might be even dangerous. But what made him wear such a Saint at all?

"How the deuce can I tell why they wear such rubbish?" Bulwrag had answered crustily. "Those foreign sailors are such fools. You know more about him than I do."

This was by no means true as yet, though Tonks hoped to make it so, if allowed his own time about it. And he told us quite earnestly, and as I believe sincerely, that he never had felt, not his mind alone, but his heart, more deeply engaged in solving the merits of the darkest horse in the leariest stable, than they

both were now in getting to the very bottom of this affair about my Kitty. And though I did not altogether like his way of putting it, when the meaning is good we must not quarrel with the manner in which other people look at things.

So we treated him well, and put him up for the night; and the following morning I drove him by way of Weybridge to Woking Road Station, or as near thereto as we could get without any one observing us. Then I went back to Weybridge, so as to meet him at that Station, and hear all he had to say, before he took another train for London.

Nothing could have been better managed. I borrowed a badge from Sims the flyman, and a spotted yellow neckerchief, and a broken whip, and Tony lounged into the inn-yard, as if he had left his cab down at the blacksmith's by the bridge. As I saw him in the distance I said to myself that nature must have meant him for the driver of a cab, for he put his knee out, and turned his heels in, and carried his elbows, as if he had been born so. Any brotherhood of good will and lofty feeling, such as that of cabmen essentially is, must welcome him at once, and make him free of any

knowledge it possessed that would bring in nothing.

And so it proved, when he rejoined me by the two o'clock train at Weybridge. "What have you ordered?" he asked; and I replied—

"Chump chops, new potatoes, and pickled onions."

"Couldn't be better," he was good enough to say; "but have in the pewter first. Blest if I believe there's anything to parch the throat like a jolly good lie, and if I've told one, I've told fifty. Dinner first, business afterwards."

That I should consent to this will show how thoroughly I had been drilled by long endurance and fretful discipline. Perpetual disappointment too, and the habit which hope had now acquired of falling without a blow—just like an over-matched prize-fighter—as well as a sense of evil fortune, drove me sometimes almost into the apathy of a fatalist. And so I let Tony Tonks munch on, and even joined him in that process.

"I wish I had got that to do again," he said, as at last he laid down knife and fork; "I don't often do so well as that. The air of these commons is uncommon sharp, sharper even than the Heath is. But you have been very

patient, and I won't keep you any longer. I found out all they knew back there, and it only cost a shilling. I don't know that it is worth much more; for it carries us very little further. But so far as it goes, it is plain enough. I had it from Joe Clipson, the man who drove them; and no secret was made of the affair to him."

Now the story, as he had it, comes to this. Some one got out at Woking Road Station, on the afternoon of May 15th, it might have been an up or it might have been a down train, Clipson could not say, for two trains came in together, and the man had no luggage of any sort. The date could be fixed by several things, and there could not be any doubt about it. And the time when two trains meet there in the afternoon is 4.15; which comes pretty close to our figures.

This man carried nothing but a little bag, a little black-leather bag, such as nine people out of ten have. There were three cabs, or flies as they call them there, waiting in the Station yard; for it is their busiest time of the day, and he chose Clipson's, because the horse looked freshest, and told him to drive to Shepperton, without saying a word about the fare.

Clipson had not been in that part long, and he had scarcely heard of Shepperton, which is severed from all those Surrey places by the unbridged river. But it seemed to him a pleasant thing to start without any fettering as to money, and the man who engaged him seemed very free of that, in a style that said—"Never stand out for a shilling." And he seems to have acted up to this; although it is scarcely ever done, except with a true friend's money. But Clipson did not care whose it was, if he might be allowed to go home with it.

The day was very bright and pleasant—exactly as I remembered it—with plenty of light in the air, but no heat, and no flies to make horses grieve that they cannot swear. Clipson remembered how cold it grew, even before the sun went down, and he tucked a sack under his calves as he came home, because he had promised Mrs. Clipson so, and his word was more tender in absence.

He said that his fare seemed to know a good bit about the principles of the road—that was the word he used for it—as if he had learned it from a map, or description which somebody had rubbed into him. But he was not in any way up to the corners, which show—as Joe

said, and with some reason too — whether a man understands what he is at properly. But he knew where he was at Chertsey Bridge, and he waved his hand at the first turn to the right.

Being a Surrey man, from some outlandish part in that straggling county, Clipson was not at all comfortable upon our side of the river. To a certain extent, and with much better reason, I feel the same thing as regards them; though I admit (without thinking twice about it) that there are plenty of good people there, and especially my Aunt Parslow. But Clipson, although he depended for his livelihood upon a Railway Station, did not like going into unknown places, especially with a horse who might come down and stop there; for there was only one sound knee out of sixteen that were washed in the yard every Saturday; but that one belonged to Clipson.

His horse was a clipper, by his own account; and nobody could tell how good he was, because he never had been called upon to do his best. Still it was a toughish journey for him; and Mr. Clipson could not see, taking the state of the roads into account, and the distance, and the waiting, how he could charge less than

five and twenty shillings; and if asked to go again he would not do it for the money. For he waited four hours, as he vowed, and I daresay it may have been three, at the publichouse, which is a sharp pull from the house of Phil Moggs at the waterside.

For these details I did not care so much (although they were full of interest) as I cared to know who the man was that employed him, and how he behaved, and whether he looked good, and above all how my darling Kitty seemed to take things, and what she said, and whether she was weeping all the way about myself. The cabman had paid no attention at all to this part of the question, and could give no more account of Kitty, than if she had been a portmanteau, or inside one. Tony Tonks had never asked (as a man of kind nature would have done) whether my dear had a handkerchief in her hand, or whether she seemed to gulp down a sob, or how she looked up at the evening-star, or even what the condition of her eyes was! For him it was quite enough to learn, that the "young 'ooman looked down in the mouth like." Well, that is the way the world goes on.

About that I cared to make no fuss; for it

even seemed a pleasure to me that none but myself should know these things; remembering as I did, that no one ever could cry as my Kitty could. For I never could understand how it was, that having so very little practice as she had (in spite of many opportunities), she could yet make anybody feel as if all the world was woe, the moment there appeared a gleam of trouble in her soft blue eyes. I am tolerably hard, and Uncle Corny harder still — from having lived so much longer—but either of us would rather have had a 64lb. box of strawberries drop from the tail of the van upon the tender places of both feet, than let a single word fall from us, even in the hottest moment, to bring a cloud into those tender eyes. However, all people are not like us; and perhaps she never let that cabman see what was the matter with her; for she was proud, as well as gentle.

Moreover the man was hungry, and that makes a world of difference. The kindest man that was ever born cannot be expected fairly to feel for his fellow-creatures, when he is yearning after animals. The heart being full of beef and mutton, because there are none in the stomach, how can any room be left for creatures of less relish? This explanation may be unsound; but

at any rate the cabman did not melt at Kitty's weeping.

And now two questions of prime importance rose in following out this tale. It was evident from two accounts, both that of Moggs the boatman and of Clipson the cab-driver, that no kind of compulsion had been used to make Kitty go with them. It was plain that she went of her own accord, deeply grieved—as the boatman's story showed—but resigned and patient. In the first place then, who was the man that had done all this to fetch her? And again, when they got to Woking Station, whither did they journey thence?

As to the first point Tony Tonks had found out little more than I did. The cabman said that he believed he would know the gent again if he saw him, but there was nothing very particular about him to notice. He seemed to be elderly, and rather short, but very sharp and active. His clothes were dark, and he wore a short cloak, not much longer than a policeman's cape. He did not sit at the young lady's side, but on the front seat opposite to her, and he did not seem to be talking to her much. It was quite dark when they left Shepperton, and it must have been ten o'clock when they arrived,

or later; for the horse was a little lame from standing still so long. They did not seem to be in any hurry, and as they had no luggage, except a couple of light bags, he did not follow them on to the platform, and could not pretend to say which way they went, for there were three more down-trains after that, and four or it might be five to London.

As to that, Tonks had made vain enquiries of the station-porters, and booking clerks. It was so long ago by this time, that even those who might have noticed them had forgotten. They had passed into the station, that was very well established; but after that nothing at all could be discovered, and there the clue broke hopelessly.

After hearing all these things, I became sadly downcast. They reminded me of that dreadful night when the snowdrifts overwhelmed me. I seemed to be walking in the same sort of maze, continually struggling to get forward, and perpetually driven back, seeming to walk with all my might, yet by a stronger power to stand still. And losing all confidence in myself, I asked Tony Tonks what he thought of it, just as if he had been the great oracle that smelled the turtle soup of

Crœsus, without even longing for a taste of it.

"It all turns out just according to my views," replied Tonks, as if he saw his views running like the gravy, which he had been saving up to drink out of the spoon; "the same as I have expressed all along, and find them confirmed more by all I discover. Any one who puts two and two together could swear that Downy Bulwrag is at the bottom of the mischief, though he has taken uncommonly good care not to show his nose in it. I am rather inclined to think that the lady is on the Continent. They are more likely to have gone down the line than up. If they had meant to go to Town, what should have taken them to Woking? Supposing they were shy of the Windsor Line, Surbiton would have been their place, or Weybridge. Though of course they might have thought Woking Road safer, so that we must not reason too much by that. By the way, can the lady speak French at all? That might make a difference to her."

"I am not at all sure," I replied after thinking; "for we never happened to talk of that. She was at a good school for a little time; and then that hateful woman, her step-

mother, took her away when she was doing well, and sent her to a wretched place at £20 a year. She can read French, I know, because I asked her something; but I doubt whether she can speak it."

"Then that's where she is. I begin to smell a rat. He took her from Southampton, depend upon it. And now I twig some bit of meaning in that copper Saint. The south of France—that's where she is."

"But why in the south of France, more than any other part?" I thought that he was jumping rather fast to his conclusions.

"Well, it might be Italy, or Spain;" he answered, with a fine generosity; "I can't say very much about it. But a brother of mine was at sea, till he was drowned, and he traded a good deal from the South of France; and he had one of those things in his hat, because of being struck by lightning. They get it very bad in those waters, he declared; but I can't call to mind the name of the Saint that stops it. Of course I have no faith in such stuff, though there might be nothing to laugh at, after all I have seen about horses. But there it is. They stick those things up, as an officer's coachman mounts a cockade; and bad luck it was for

Master Downy's knuckles. His hand was like a pease-pudding yesterday. His flesh is always of a yellow nature, like a Cochin China's. Shouldn't wonder a bit, if he got lockjaw."

"Not till I have settled with him." It made me forget the Rev. Peter, and all his style of regarding things, when people spoke as if right and wrong had an equal claim upon the Lord in heaven.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WANDERING GLEAM.

My Uncle however was not like that. He had suffered too largely from rogues himself, in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden, to have any calm way of considering them.

"Either a man is honest through and through, or else he is a thief all over. It is humbug to talk as if a fellow didn't know when he is stealing, or when he is not. He knows it pretty sharp when it is done to him; and he puts it short, as he has a right to do. And then he turns the corner, and he wipes his mouth, and serves others with the dose that made him sputter. To cheat the man that cheated you, is Christian enough; but not to pass it on to other people. Ask Mr. Golightly what he thinks about it."

That pious clergyman would scarcely have been satisfied even with my Uncle's view of

Christian conduct, although he was moderate in his expectations of us, after all his experience of our doings. This made it very pleasant to be with him frequently; and for my part I am certain that I never could have lasted through all this gloom, and suspense, and indignation, without his example and quiet comfort. All that we had found out, at Shepperton and at Woking, I owed to him, or at any rate to my acquaintance with him; and although it might not seem as yet to carry me much further, still I found some happiness in knowing that little, and hope of learning more from it. And now I went to him about another question, which I could not settle for myself.

It may be remembered that Tabby Tapscott, who came to attend to my Uncle's house, had more than once given me good advice; and some may have set me down as ungrateful for keeping her out of sight since my great disaster, as if she were of no importance. But the real truth is, that I had sought her counsel almost every time I saw her, and had found much comfort from it, because she was so scornful. For the little woman tossed her head, and shot forth her under-lip, as if she could not trust herself to speak, so thoroughly

was her mind made up. She looked upon all that had happened as the fruits of a foul conspiracy on the part of man against woman, and she scarcely held me guiltless. And she had no patience with me, because I would not do the proper thing, to find out all about it. Until I did that, she would say no more, but leave me to listen to a set of zanies. Why on earth I refused was more than she could understand; and she went so far as to declare, once or twice, that I could not be in earnest about getting Kitty back, or I would have done it long ago. She herself had known a girl, of Westdown parish in the North of Devon, who found out all about her sweetheart's murder, and got two men hanged for committing it.

The means were certainly simple enough, if anything would come of them. The bereaved one must let the full moon pass for as short a time as possible; and then, at twelve of the middle-day, go to the dress last worn by the lost one, and take something from the left-side pocket, or failing that cut a piece out. Then he might carry on as he pleased, until it came to bed-time, and then do as follows. Under the pillow on his left-hand side, he must place whatever he had taken from the dress, and

then instead of his common prayers, pray in the following manner—

> "Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
> Bring me back my love that's gone.
> Bring her white, or bring her red,
> According as she is 'live or dead."

Then he must throw the window up, or out, if it was a lattice, and look at the moon which would then be up (for he was supposed to keep good hours, as all gentle lovers should); and after that he must lie down, with his left ear on the pillow, and repeat the Doxology—which Tabby called the "Doxy"—until it made him go to sleep. Then, as sure as he was a living man—or in the other case a living woman—the lost one would appear at midnight, and tell him all about it. Only he, or she, must ask no question, and above all offer no contradiction.

Now, I have never been superstitious; though some of the wisest men I have met with seem at times to be so; and I laughed at all this stuff of Tabby's, although I had found her truthful. Then I asked her to go through it all for me; but she stared at my stupidity; "As if her would come nigh me!" she said. "It is the love as does it, and the Angels to the back of it."

But when she kept on so about it, and assured

me that much wiser people than I, and a long sight better—as she was good enough to say—had tried this plan and been set up by it; I began to think that it could do no harm, and if it afforded her any pleasure—why, no one else need hear of it. Except that the sin of witchcraft is most strongly denounced in the Bible; and many might think that this proceeding savoured of that character. However if the Church of England could be brought to sanction it, the Powers of the air might do their worst; for our Church is built upon a rock.

The Rev. Peter Golightly said, when I opened out this case to him, that he was a little surprised to find me listening to such nonsense. I told him that it was very far from my desire to do so; but if it was likely to ease the minds of others, it might be my duty to go on with it. At this he laughed, and did not say, but seemed perhaps to mean it, that I was not bound to make a fool of myself, because my brother fools wished it. However I was not going to be argued down about it; and I put the question point-blank to him, whether there was any sin in it. He could not say that there was any; but being more on his mettle now, declared that it was rank folly, and insisted very strongly

on the superiority of prayer. There I had him on the nail; for what was this but a mode of prayer, invoking also those holy writers, who alone have taught us the use of prayer? He shook his head, as if unconvinced; but his daughter called him away just then, and I did not care to renew the subject, feeling that now I had his permission; which he might recall, if argued with.

The moon was full at six o'clock in the morning, as Uncle Corny said; and he always knew everything about her, except the weather she would bring. And at noon I went to my dear wife's frock, the one she had worn on the very day before she disappeared from me. She had kept them on a row of hooks—for we were not rich in wardrobes—with a scarf of something drawn along to keep the dust from settling. It had been one of my sorest jobs to unhang them very reverently, remembering when she had worn them last, and how my arm had been round them. For she had a very pretty way of coming up in the morning (when her hair was done, and her collar on) for me to tell her how she looked, and to see that all her strings were right. But now these empty dresses lay, all folded, and locked in the bottom drawer.

I may be soft beyond most people—although it is a fault more shared than shown—but when I had spread that simple frock upon the bed, which I never entered now, and passing both hands down the bosom clumsily searched (as a man must do) for the mouth of the little pocket, and then could only get three fingers in—all the strength of my resolve to be quite firm and manly quivered on my lips, and melted in the haze that crept across my eyes. A tiny notebook, with a pencil, and a silver thimble, a little housewife, and a button meant to be sewn on my coat, two or three jujubes (which she kept to pop into my mouth, because she fancied I was hoarse sometimes) nothing for herself, but all for me, or for my service; and then a little scrap of paper, my last scribble from the garden—"Darling, not till nine o'clock"—as I took them one by one, all seemed fragrant with her sweetness, and holy from her loving hand.

I could not bring myself to go through Tabby's rigmarole that night; for my mind was full of larger thoughts, neither would I go upstairs into the lonely bedroom; but I gazed for some time at the moon, as people when in sorrow do, by some mysterious instinct. And then I placed a pillow, instead of the roll of mat

beneath my head, and under it my dear wife's housewife, and her pretty thimble, not for that night only, but as my companions henceforth; and therewith I cast myself on the hard church-cushion, and thought of her. Before very long, I fell asleep, having done a good day's garden-work at sundry jobs that were sadly in arrear.

But Tabby's jingle was still in my head, moving without my will or wish, as a mouse comes in the wainscote; and with the moon shining into the room, one of my last reflections was that I had been very lucky in yielding to no witchcraft. Not that there could be anything to frighten me in my darling, "whether white, or whether red;" by which the old chant seemed to mean, whether she might be in the bloom of health, or the wan hue of the winding-sheet. In either case she would love me still; and that was the thing I cared most to know.

Suddenly, I sat up and looked. The old church clock was striking slowly, and the sleepy sound loitered on the drowsy air. The moon was gliding calmly on her southern road, and being in her humble summer state, she could scarcely top the big pear-tree which stood before my window. The room was full of light and shade, in bars, in patches, and in triangles, with

no strong contrast in and out, but fused, like silver-wire netting, or water parted by the weir-posts, and rejoining under them. And there, in this faint flow of light and wavering ebb of shadow, I saw my Kitty, sitting calmly, and gazing at me stedfastly.

No surprise or fear whatever crossed my mind—which seems to show that I was not altogether wide awake; but I waited for her to say something, while she kept on looking at me. I had left off wearing a nightcap ever since I went to Hampton School; not that I ever slept there, but because the boys had laughed at it. My Uncle Corny always said that this was tempting Providence; and now I tried to put up my hands, but they would not go, and I sat and gazed, being a little surprised, but not amazed, as some people might have been. Then Kitty put up her hand to me, showing the palm of it quite rosy, as it always had been; and I saw that her dress was the one in the drawer; but that did not surprise me.

"Darling, you must be patient still. I am thousands of miles away from you;" she spoke as quietly as if she were saying—"The tea is not quite drawn yet," and I received it as quietly. "There is a good reason for my

going; and you know it better than I do. Only, be happy till I come back; for whatever you feel, I feel. When I come home, we shall never part again."

This was a little too much for me, high and tragical as it seemed.

"I want you now. Oh, Kitty, Kitty, don't run away again!" I cried; and over went both my Windsor chairs, as I sprang up, to fling my arms round her.

But when I came to the place where she had been, lo, there was no one! Everything was cold and hard; instead of her soft warm figure, all I embraced was a kitchen towel; and the handle of a gridiron came between my vainly opened lips.

CHAPTER IX.

A BAD NIGHT.

Nevertheless, that vision, if it was a vision, cheered me. The more I thought of it, the more I felt that it meant something; and though free as any man can be from human superstition, here I found a special mercy, showing that I was not quite abandoned and forsaken. But I took good care not to make myself the laughing-stock of any one. Neither Uncle Corny, nor Henderson (who was now come back from his honeymoon), nor even Tabby Tapscott, who might well claim the best right of all, ever heard a word of it. To Mr. Golightly alone I spoke at all about the matter, and he, instead of laughing at me, took it very gravely.

"It is meant to encourage you," he said; "and you should be thankful. Many even of the true believers have their doubts, as is natural, whether our little earthly course is

guided by a higher hand; or whether in the light of full instruction we are left to work it out. But I venture to think with the men of old, that all things are ordered for us. You have had a bitter trial, such as befalls very few so young; and you have borne it well, my friend. Sometimes you have been gloomy and downcast, but never bitter. A more mysterious affliction I have never witnessed, and you know well how my heart is with you, though I seldom speak of it. 'Bear and be strong' is the true watchword, and you have kept it nobly. I pray that I may live to see you in your happiness again; and you may without presumption hold that this has been vouchsafed you, as a token of approval, and a signal to encourage you."

So I tried to take it, though it seemed but meagre comfort. And I wished that I had broken my knees again, before I jumped up in such haste, and spoiled the chance of learning more. My darling seemed to have finished; but if I had only waited, very likely she would have begun again, as women generally do. Of geography I had little knowledge, except as taught at a grammar-school, and then it went some three inches down the "World as known to the ancients." I doubted whether the south

of France could be "thousands of miles" from Sunbury, though that might be a poetical expression, and no lady is expected to be accurate. And what was meant by the declaration, that I knew better than she did the reason of her quitting me? That looked as if I had done something wrong; and an inspired vision should have known that I had never even glanced at any other woman. Thinking of all this, I was puzzled, almost as much as comforted.

In the next thing that occurred I found a further element of puzzle, but none at all of comfort. It was now the usual thing for me, being in bachelor condition, to turn into my Uncle Corny's house, at the time he was having his early dinner. Not that it mattered much to me; only that I was able thus to save myself from bread and cheese, and secure a little nourishment.

I was doing this to the best of my ability, without observing it, when in came Tony Tonks, as if he was running away from the bailiff. One of my firm convictions was that thin men never panted; but that impression, like all others, now required revising. Tony Tonks was in such a state, alike of mind and body, that neither could at all work out the meaning of the other.

We happened to have a little bit of boiled beef and young carrots; and my Uncle was just helping me to a scutcheon of gristle at the corner. For he liked to keep a level cut, and he found me fitter now than he was, for the horny places. But Tony was in such a state, that when his knife and fork were laid, he said—"Not a bit for me, sir."

My Uncle looked at him as if he were troubled with his ears again, as he had been last winter. "Certainly, a nice bit," he said; "and close to the bone accordingly. We buy it fresh, and we pickle it. At this time of year, the butchers make it leather with saltpetre."

Tony saw that his face was stern; and to escape acrimony, he took my plate with all upon it that should have been for my inside. To this sort of thing I am too much accustomed to remonstrate.

"Not a word, till you have finished," my Uncle spoke decisively; "I have known a man who cut his throat, by talking too much at dinner-time."

Mr. Tonks looked not unlikely to commit this error; but after yielding to my Uncle's orders he seemed better. Then he crossed his knife and fork, which is a very defiant thing to do,

and said as if he shot a pea at us—"I am come to throw up my appointment."

My Uncle did not speak at first. When people took him suddenly, he would not be disturbed by any contagious gush of suddenness. And he waited for Tony to go on, instead of being pushed by him.

"What I mean is"—Tonks continued, seeing that he might as well go slowly—"I have done the best I can; and there is nothing more to be made of it. I can make out all about a horse, because he is straightfor'ard. But about a man is a different thing; and I shall go back to my business."

"Have you been frightened?" asked my Uncle, looking at him steadily.

"Not a bit of it. What is there to frighten me, or any one? In the eye of the law, we are all equal. The man who killed me would swing as high as if he had killed Prince Albert."

"But that would not bring you back to life. You have been frightened, Tony Tonks; and it is useless to deny it."

"Well, my life is as much to me as the greatest man's that ever lived. 'Frightened' is not the proper word. Only I look things in the face, and weigh the rusk against the risk; and

I find the last come heavier. And I am wanted now for the Leger nags. I am worth ten pounds a week at least, so I wish to say good-bye to you."

"I call you a coward, and a sneak," said my Uncle, getting his wrath up; "and it serves us altogether right for dealing with such a fellow. I could not bear it from the first; but I listened to other people, as I am always much too apt to do. You won't have your spy-money, I can tell you, for any day since Saturday."

"Ah, but I've got it," answered Mr. Tonks, who seemed well accustomed to reproaches; "it was paid in advance, you must remember. I have cashed it, and mean to stick to it."

"I don't quite see how that can be," said my Uncle, with great sagacity; "you must be making some mistake. You can never have got so in front of us."

"Ah, but I have, old cock, I have. All expenses paid; and here is my five-pound note, as safe as eggs." He tapped his pocket, in a manner quite unworthy of an experienced tout.

"Very kind of you to show us. We will have it back." My uncle seized him by the waist, and planted him on the table. "Leave

him to me, Kit. He won't hurt me, and I won't hurt him, if he is quiet."

He pinned the spy's arms with one of his, and took the note from his waistcoat pocket, while the poor man struggled vainly. Then he set him again on the floor, and said, "You should learn to be more just, my friend."

"Highway robbery!" shouted Tonks.

"High table, you mean," said my uncle.

"I'll fetch the police. I'll give you in charge. I'll take out a warrant. I'll——"

"You won't do anything of the sort. Sit down, and reason quietly. You have broken contract; and if you were one of my workmen, I would pay you nothing. But as you are a poor little jackanapes, and did your best for us, I believe, until you got into this blue funk, you shall have half of this money, Tonks, to pay your way back to your proper work. But only on one condition—that you tell us what has scared you so."

"Well," answered Tonks very sulkily; "I always do what is fair and right. But you can't expect a man to go with his life in his hand, to please you. Fact of it is I got into grief by following up that Migwell Bengoose, or whatever his name is. I told you that I was

bound to do it, before Downy went to see him again, unless I could get any chance, you know, of seeing what was in that packet. And I got no chance at all of that, though I did my best in Bulwrag's rooms, whenever I went to see him. But his hand, in spite of all the doctor's work, got swollen as big as a horse's head pretty nearly; and his temper became that frightful, that I scarcely durst go nigh him, and of course there was nothing to watch, when he could scarcely get about at all. Naturally I did my best to make something out of his grumbles; but he would not have it, and at last he says, 'Bowles, what the devil are you always after me for? It ain't from friendly affection,' he says, 'and I can't pick up anything now, you see. If you want to spy into family affairs, I've got one hand left,' he says, 'and that's enough for you.'

"Well, that was pretty plain, you know. And worse than that, in comes the Doctor, and says he will not answer for his life, unless he goes into some place where he can be properly nursed and tended. So Downy makes his mind up in two minutes, gives up his rooms in Dover Street, and goes back to Bulwrag Park, as they call it, for his mother to coddle and comfort

him. And there they've got a hospital nurse, and a wheel-chair, and I don't know what all; and much too grand of course for me to go near with a binocle. 'You'd better come and see my mother, Bowles, when you want any further information,' Downy said to me, with his frightful grin, like a yellow mangle-wuzzle, 'ah, she does like answering questions—light and sweetness, that's her nature!'

"So I was shut off, as you may suppose; and I pretty soon found out what made him so suspicious. He discovered somehow that I had been living, for the first week, you know, not afterwards, at good mother Wilcox's place near by, and they look upon her as an enemy, no doubt, having been nurse to the young lady they have stolen. If you try any more watching work up there, you must not make that the head-quarters, for they keep a look-out there, you may depend. But I don't see what more you have now to watch. The lady is out of England, you may take that for certain; most likely she is snug in some lunatic asylum, or nunnery perhaps, or monastery"—Mr. Tonks was not well versed in such matters—"either in the South of France, or somewhere on the Continent; and unless you can lay hold of Downy

Bulwrag, and put him on the rack (as they do in Spain) until he squeaks out all the truth, there's no chance of your being much the wiser. I mean of course, unless she escapes, or comes to herself, or whatever it may be, and tells you all about it with her own lips; and that is not very likely. They know what they are about, a great deal better than you do."

"Because they are scoundrels, and we are honest men," said my Uncle, making the little room resound; "it may take a long time, but we shall win, and grind them beneath our heels, sir. You have seen as much robbery, Tony Tonks, as any man yet created. Now don't deny it, don't falter with it; but speak, as you will have to speak that day, when you go where lies are useless. Have you ever known cheating prosper?"

"Better than anything else in the world. You can't get on without it, Mr. Orchardson."

"You know what I mean. Don't play with words. Does it prosper in the long run?"

"It would, if they only knew when to stop; but that is just where the difference is. An honest man stops in good time, you know."

"An honest man never begins," said my

Uncle; "but it is no good talking to you, Tonks. You have got corrupted altogether. Well, what did you do about Bengoose?"

"Ah, that's just the point, that is. Says I to myself—'Now the coast is clear, and I'll have a turn at that fellow. Downy is laid up with his Mammy, and I'll get to the bottom of that affair.' So I set off last night, with a pistol in my pocket, one of those Colt's revolver things; for I knew it was a bad place, and they might not stick at trifles. And sure enough, they didn't, as you must acknowledge. I came up very quiet, and knocked gently at the door, and said 'Cluck!' as the fellow gave the ticket. It was opened very civil, and I asked for Migwell Bengoose, and the man said 'All right, just wait a minute.' A little dark place it was, under the stairs, and I did not much like the look of it; for I could hear a lot of voices further on, and they seemed to be drinking and card-playing. However I sat down where I was told, and began to think over my story. My plan was to tell him that the Captain was ill, and had sent me to say that the papers were all right, but he would like to know how he got hold of them, and where he could get the others that were mentioned in them, and to pay him a

sovereign, just to keep things going, till the Captain should be about again. The fellow would remember seeing me with him, and I had made up a very nice tale of it.

"But the smell of the place was something awful, worse than all the bookmakers put together, and there is plenty to spare when you get among them. Either that, or something else, made me feel quite heavy, and I began to doze a little, though I fought very hard against it. And all of a sudden, before I could jump up, there was a leather strap round me, and my arms were buckled in it, as tight as you had me on that table, Squire; and a deal worse than that, for I was fastened to the chair, with a dollop of some stinking stuff across my eyes and mouth, so that I was blind and pretty well choked. Then my legs were tied together as tight as any hayband, and in that way I was left, I shall never know how long, to listen to a lot of blackguards laughing. There were women cackling too among the hooting of the men, and they cried 'Cluck, cluck, my noble cock!' and the worse I tried to rave at them the better they enjoyed it. Then they searched me, and took all my money, and my pistol, and threw me chair and all upon the floor, and

whacked me on the arms and legs with a towel knotted up.

"I thought my last moment was come; and it would have been, if I had not shammed dead, and rolled over against the wall, where I got a little air, by rubbing the sacking against it, for I could not get my hands near my mouth. Then they began to talk in some thieves' lingo, which I could not make head or tail of. But the upshot was that they released my face, and gave me some horrible stuff to drink, and let me lie there the Lord knows how long. I would rather die straight off than have such another night, for I saw great holes in the floor, and expected to be pitched down, and never come up again.

"At last a big fellow came and untied me, and pitched me out of the cellar-flap. 'Had enough of cluck, cluck, haven't you, old chap?' he said as he banged the door behind me. And I found it was daylight, and I was in the court, where I hid behind the truck from Downy. I was in such a state that I could scarcely crawl; but a good-natured coster put me on his barrow, and took me out to Drury Lane, and there I found a cab. I never saw Bengoose all the time; but no doubt he had arranged it all, under orders

from Downy Bulwrag. If you don't think I have had enough of this job, I do, Mr. Orchardson."

"Show your legs," said my Uncle, with a smile in which there was not too much compassion; "I don't wish to be hard upon a man in trouble; but you are given to romance a little, by your own account, friend Tonks."

"Never to my employers, sir. But look here!"

His poor little drumsticks had plainly been acting the part of the drum quite recently, and were painted of divers colours, while a broad stripe showed where the ligaments had been.

"I have a better opinion of you, Tonks, than I ever expected to have," said my uncle. "You are a plucky little chap. Here's your five-pound note, for you have earned it. It was your fault that I took it from you, because you defied me. Now go back to your proper work. And if ever you come this way, look in, and I will give you a good dinner."

CHAPTER X.

PRINCE'S MANSION.

When any man has once got into a racing state of mind, it is not fair to his bodily health to keep him in a wheatfield. Sam Henderson had been expected, by his bride and her female relatives, to walk about in country places, and sit on stiles, and admire the moon; like a young man from Whitechapel coming to feel his way to be a teacher. Sam had borne it pretty well, as a thing not likely to come twice, till he found it too much to come once. For he was not of my quiet nature; and still less could it be supposed that his Sally was like my Kitty.

He went off to some races at York, I think, or somewhere nicely convenient, for they were on the eastern coast; and he offered, as fairly as a man could do, to let his bride come with him. But she said she saw too much of horses at home, and preferred to remain with her land-

lady. He thought that she was too independent, and she thought the same of him; but they soon made up that little matter, and came home to Halliford as affectionate as need be.

Sam was beginning to boast about his condition prematurely. If any friend of his replied to his sudden invitations—"Sam, I should be most delighted; but it might be inconvenient, you know, to Mrs. Henderson"—Sam would look at him with a laugh, and say—"The best soul living, my dear boy. Always proud to welcome any friend of mine, at any time. We pull together, and no mistake. You may come with your coat on inside out, and she won't say a word, till I do."

To this I listened very gravely, knowing what a good wife is, but doubting whether it can be wise to take such liberties with her. And I knew that Sam was a pleasant fellow, partly because of his bounce and brag. Whatever belonged to him became pure gold or glittering jewel; as there are Oriental gems, which glow at the touch of the owner. Nobody had such dogs or horses, nobody had such clever men; and now we were to believe that no one had ever owned such a wonder of a wife.

"Let us go and see how they get on," I said

to my Uncle Corny, when a grand invitation on gilt paper was brought by a man in a pink silk jacket, riding a horse full of ringlets; "'Mr. and Mrs. Henderson beg to be favoured with the company of Mr. Orchardson, and his nephew Mr. Christopher Orchardson, at dinner at half-past six o'clock on Tuesday, the 12th instant.' And look at the top in gold letters, Uncle—'Prince's Mansion, Halliford!'"

"Prince's Mansion!" cried my Uncle; "get my specs, or I won't believe it. Well, there are fools in this world! I knew they had got into that old ramshackle house, that was let to some foreign fellow, who bolted from his creditors. Prince's Mansion! Oh my goodness! Why don't they say—Windsor Castle? You may go, if you like. But you don't catch me. And half-past six! I couldn't wait till then. It's too late for dinner, and too early for supper. You go and see them, and say I won't come."

"But it must be answered on paper, Uncle. And you must never say you won't come, you must say you can't."

"I am not going to tell any lie about it. I can go well enough, if I choose; but I don't. You suppose that I don't know how to behave. I can behave as well as the best of them."

"You have got a blue coat with brass buttons," I said on purpose to irritate him; "it was all the fashion twenty years ago; but I am afraid you have got too fat for it."

"You are getting horribly cheeky, Kit. You are catching it from that Henderson. What would Kitty say, if she were here? There, I never meant to vex you, lad. I'll go, if that will please you."

When the great day came, my Uncle looked as well as the very best of them. He had an old Sunday coat let out, for he would not buy a new one, and he wore his big watch with three gold seals, and black silk stockings, and knee-breeches. Also he had a velvet waistcoat, double-breasted with coral buttons, which he had bought for my wedding-day, and a frilled shirt, and his white curls brushed in a very becoming frizzle. "A' look'th like a bishop," old Tabby pronounced, though perhaps she had never seen one; "but no bishop han't got such legs as thiccy."

Aunt Parslow, as an old friend of Sally Chalker, was invited specially, and came over in style with a pair of horses, and her dinner-dress done up in a long silken package. She called at my Uncle's on her way to Prince's

Mansion, and they laughed so that I was surprised at their manners, considering who was to feed them that day. But perhaps they felt no gratitude before they got it.

It was a good step to Sam's house, for Prince's Mansion stood in the upper part of his grounds, nearly half a mile from his "Doctor's Shop," as he called the place where he had feasted me, and where he had been content to live. Though the days were now getting short again, and our road led away from the village, it was likely enough that we might come across neighbours, who would be astonished at my Uncle's appearance, and could hardly fail to run home, and publish throughout the village that the Grower was out of his right mind at last.

To save any difficulty about this, we sent for Sims and his ancient fly, and putting up the windows went in state to the dinner at Prince's Mansion.

My Uncle had been positive and almost snappish, in asserting his knowledge of the world; and I had given him credit on the strength of that for knowing almost everything. But now he showed signs of some anxiety and doubt, as we passed through the gate at the beginning of the drive, and he glanced at his

nails, which were of a steady brown, and his knuckles, which resembled door-knobs.

"There won't be any ladies of course," he said; "besides Mrs. Sam and Aunt Parslow. Just look to my collar, this side, Kit. It seems to cut uncommon hard."

"Ladies?" I replied; "why, there'll be a dozen, according to what Sam said yesterday. There are three Miss Chalkers, Sally's Aunts, and three Miss Kempes her cousins, and Mrs. Spry from Tonbridge Wells, and three or four racing ladies, and a very fashionable one, and very beautiful I believe, whose name is Lady Kick-loose. So you see your velvet waistcoat won't be wasted, Uncle Corny."

"If I had known this, I would have stopped at home. Why, I shall have one on each arm! I like people to talk with that I know all about. By the by, I forget—which arm is considered the most polite to walk with?"

"It does not matter much. But you will do very well, if you don't begin to tell any of your long stories. People won't have them now. All they care for is what they call general conversation."

"If I am not allowed to tell my old stories," my Uncle replied indignantly, "all I can do is

to hold my tongue. What is the good of bits and splinters? You can't make anybody laugh like that. You must take your time, and let them think what's coming. It's just the same as carrying a pint of beer. If you are jogged on the elbow all the froth runs over. I give a man his time, and I like to have my own."

"To be sure, and they'll be glad enough to listen to you, when they have had their own talk out. But one thing I want you to do particularly. You are so sharp in seeing everything. You observe so much better than I do."

"Well, you can't expect to be equal to me yet. Though you are not a fool, Kit; not half so much a fool as some who think they are mighty clever. What is it you want me to notice, my boy?"

"Why, I want you to notice particularly how Sally behaves to her husband. To hear him talk, one would suppose that he had got a perfect jewel—a model of a wife that worships him, and would crawl on her knees to please him. In fact, you would think she was fifty times the wonder that my Kitty was. But from what I know of Sally Chalker, I don't believe a word of it."

"Ha, ha! Jealous, is it?" he answered most

absurdly. "I'll keep my eyes wide open, Kit, and report accordingly."

Sam Henderson was a most hospitable fellow, and not a single word shall pass my lips which might be twisted by captious persons into a reflection upon him. He sat at the bottom of his table, and he never took his eyes from the plates on the right hand and the left, except when he was calling Tom, his groom, to change them, or to fetch them that he might put more on each. Even Lady Kickloose, who was a very lovely woman, could not make demand keep pace with the quick abundance of supply. Hence it was the more unreasonable, and I might even say despotic, on the part of the new Mrs. Henderson, that she kept on calling down the table—"Sam, look at father's plate, he never will mind himself, you know;" or—"Sam, can't you see that Aunt Maggy has not got a morsel?" or—"Mr. Henderson, Lady Kickloose has never had one drop of gravy!"

"All right, my love. Beg pardon, I am sure. Tom, why don't you move a little quicker?"—poor Sam Henderson would reply. But I thought it was not "all right, my love," that a man who was doing his best for us all, and getting but a snap or two for his own

mouth, should be hurried and flurried in this sort of way, and almost accused of inattention to his guests. I could scarcely help saying—"Do let him alone;" but I knew the proprieties too well for that.

"You are right, Ma'am; she does look beautiful," I heard my Uncle say to one of the three unmarried aunts; and then he gazed at her with as much admiration, as if she had been—no matter who, but some one very different.

And I was pleased to see a large piece of greens drop from his mouth into his grand breast-frill, which put him out of countenance for half an hour. In my poor opinion, his admiration was as much out of place as that piece of greens, though I will not deny that our hostess was what is called a very fine young woman. She wore a dress of green satin, which I never could endure any more than Kitty could; and the way it was cut below the neck and shoulders filled me with surprise that Sam allowed it; but perhaps he could not help himself. I was glad to see Miss Parslow looking shocked, and I glanced at her and then at it, but she did not think fit to comprehend. Uncle Corny on the other hand sur-

prised me by treating it as a joke rather than a scandal; gentlemen wore cut-away coats, he said, and why should not ladies wear cut-away gowns?

Presently I happened to catch some words from the lower end of the table, which drew my attention from Sam's wife, and brought it back to my own affairs. The dinner was a very good and solid one; not fifty varieties of unknown substance, such as we too often meet with; and yet quite enough of change for the most inconstant person. There was very nice white soup, and mock turtle—not the real, such as my Aunt Parslow gave, but quite as good, if not better—then a cod of great size and high character, with oysters as fat as mushrooms; and after that a saddle of mutton at one end, and an aitch-bone, not over-boiled, at the other; one lying down, and the other standing up. Foreigners may disguise their stuff, which by their own confession requires it. But an Englishman likes to know what he is at, that his conscience may go with his stomach.

These things are trifles, in a way of speaking; but if they lead up to a pleasant state of mind, it is not friendly to neglect them; and my Uncle Corny, who had kept himself to bread

and cheese at his proper dinner-time, was rejoicing, as a just man does, in the victory of his merits. Such joy is generally premature; if he had only known what was to come, he would have thrown down knife and fork, and waited.

For as if by magic, there appeared, in front of Sam himself, and almost making him look trivial, the most magnificent bird that ever alighted on any table. I asked a young lady what it was; and she said—"The swan of the Romans." It did not become me to contradict her; but I thought that the Romans must have owned a breed of swans superior to ours, for this one had a peacock's tail spread out. Everybody looked at everybody else, while Sam turned his cuffs up, and sharpened a new knife.

"Round with the Champagne, Tom! We will drink my wife's health." As he spoke, he had his eyes upon the peacock's tail; and rude as it was, all the company laughed.

A pair of large tongues had been put before me, and as I began to carve them, I heard a lady say—"No fear. Downy will be flush of money now. Be down on him sharp; that's the way to do it."

"Are you sure it will come off?" asked the

gentleman she was talking to; and I saw that it was Mr. Welch, a great man of the ring, speaking earnestly to Lady Kickloose.

"What is to prevent it? The fatal day is named. It is too good for him, as everybody says. But you know where marriages are made."

"And where they end, with a fellow of that sort. But I can't take it down—even now I can't. Such a lot of brass, you know, my lady! And what has he got to show for it?"

"Brass—and his mother;" replied the lady, who had picked up the pithy style of the turf. "The old Earl is a duffer. Mother Bull can walk round him any Saturday."

"Yes; but young ladies have wills of their own. It is out of my line, but I have always heard that Lady Clara could have the pick of England. What can there be in Downy, to fetch her so?"

"How can I tell you, Mr. Welch? Such things happen continually. All we have to do is to follow them up. I never liked the man; but that is no reason why she shouldn't. Bread-sauce, I suppose, goes with peacock."

Sam was in his glory all this time, and the dinner went on very merrily, with plenty of

laughing, and glasses clinking, and even the most demure ladies smiling. My Uncle, who had cherished a pure contempt for sporting men, began to think better of them, and more and more as his opinion was asked delivered it on subjects he had never heard of. Aunt Parslow also was exceedingly good-natured, and held a very interesting talk with a lady who had heard of her father. And I took the opportunity, before we went away, to remind Mrs. Henderson of our old doings, when she was the belle of Leatherhead; and I thought that she looked at me very nicely, and felt very deeply for my present sad condition; and after all I could not contradict my Uncle, when he said—with five and sixpence in his pocket, which he had won by very fine play at whist—that we had been treated most handsomely and kindly, and if he should be asked to their Christmas dinner, he meant to make a point of going.

CHAPTER XI.

RELIEF OF MIND.

But what I had heard about Downy Bulwrag rooted itself more and more in my mind. Since the departure of Tony Tonks (who would never have been invited to that grand dinner, for even racing people must draw the line somewhere), I had made up my mind to go and see the arch-enemy, as soon as ever he should be in his proper health again. And with an eye to that, I had written to Mrs. Wilcox, requesting her to let me know of his first re-appearance.

It was not my desire to fall upon this villain, at a time when he could not defend himself, for I did not intend to mince matters with him, if once I could come to close quarters. And even of those who insist most strongly on the Christian duty of forgiveness, and look down from the greatest height upon the littleness of resentment, probably few—if they cared to

speak the truth—would have put up with things as I did.

It was all very fine for the people to say—"Take it easily, my dear friend. With patience, and the will of God, you will find everything come right; and by and by, you will be surprised at your own excitement about it."

The thing that surprised me most of all was my own power of endurance; and sometimes I felt quite hot inside, at having two strong arms, and doing nothing with them. "It was not thus you won your Kitty, but by knocking down Sam Henderson," the springy part of my conscience said sometimes to the spongy half of it; "if you let rogues have their way, you are only a rogue yourself, and a coward."

This reproach I did not deserve. No fear of bodily harm to myself had crossed my thoughts for a moment; but the dread of some reckless act had been perpetually with me. It was easy enough to do violent things; to cut myself off for ever from all hope of love and happiness, without much chance of even learning the secret of my misery. The enemy I feared, in the burst of pent-up fury, was myself.

I began to forget this discretion now. That the man, who had ruined my life to gorge some

filthy spite of his own, should now jump up in the world, and crow, and dance, with gold in his pockets, and love in his arms, while I lay a widower on two chairs; that he should have grins on his vile yellow face, while my Kitty was weeping her eyes out somewhere; and that every one should take it as a thing of course, and praise his sagacity and worship him—if justice had broken her beam like this, what law could there be to bind any one? The scoundrel had come to gloat upon my sorrow; I would just return the call, and have a word with him.

Fearing the loss of my self-command, I took not even a walking-stick, nor the true Briton's mainstay, an umbrella, although the day was showery. Neither did I change my working-clothes, but without a word to any one saddled old *Spanker*, and started directly after breakfast. In an hour, I dismounted at the door of Mrs. Wilcox, and gave the sharp boy my horse to lead about.

"Whatever can be the matter with you, Master Kit?" his mother enquired very kindly. "You don't look a bit like yourself, sir. Do come in; I have got a sight to tell you."

"Thank you; when I come back will do. I

am going to pay a little call—not more than half an hour." Before she could answer, I was out of hearing.

When I rang and knocked loudly at the door of the old house, a man servant came, and I was glad of that; for I could not have forced my way past a woman.

"I wish to see Mr. Bulwrag," I said.

"Never sees any one at this time of day. He has not finished breakfast yet," answered the man.

"It does not matter. I must see him. I have heard that he is quite well again."

"Oh yes, he is well enough;" the man gave a smile, which meant—a great deal better than he deserves to be—"but you must call again in the afternoon."

"Thank you. I intend to see him now. Show me the room, if you please, my friend."

"That is the room. But you must not go in." He offered no resistance, when he saw that it would not stop me; and I knocked at the door, and then entered.

Donovan Bulwrag wore a dressing-gown, braided with gold, and was lighting a cigar, after making (as the dishes showed) a long and goodly breakfast.

"Holloa! Who are you?" His tone was rough and arrogant; but I saw by his eyes that he knew me, and his heavy mouth was twitching. "What the devil do you mean, by coming in like this?"

"Are you in your usual health and strength?" I would not have touched him, if he had answered, "No."

"To be sure, I am. But what business is that of yours? I always kick insolent cads out of the room."

"I will not foul my tongue with any words to you. My business is to lead you three times round this room, by the nose. Now try to stop me." As I spoke, I was putting on a gardening glove.

He struck at me with all his force; but I dashed up his fist with my left hand, while with the right I got a firm grip upon his bulky nose. In vain he let fly at me, right and left; I did not even feel his blows, though the marks were plain long afterwards. Then he tried to grapple me; but I would not have it. Three times round the room I led him, while he roared and shrieked with pain, and then I flung him backward into his easy chair.

I cannot say how I was enabled to do this;

and I doubt whether any one can explain it. But before I felt the difficulty, it was over; and I was fit to do it again, if needful.

Downy Bulwrag had never been amazed before, because he was a cold-blooded fellow; and that made it all the worse for him, when he could not avoid it. I am thankful to the Lord—who has always guided me, when I do not depart too far from Him—that this happened so; for my heart was up, and my brain had not a whisper left in it. Life and death are mere gossamer, at such moments.

On the table lay a long sharp ham-knife. If Bulwrag had said a word, or even stirred, he would never have done one or other again. That knife would have been in his heart. And I—well, the gallows and the devil would be welcome to me afterwards. He saw my eyes dwell on that blade, and he was cowed. He knew that he had a madman standing over him; and happily for both of us, he fell into a faint.

"Blackguard," I shouted, "you have had a narrow shave. This comes of meddling between man and wife."

I seized the long knife, while he pawed with his fat hands, and flung it just clear of his big

yellow head. The blade cleft the panel of black oak behind him, and quivered, and rang like the tongue of a bell.

Without another word I left him thus, flinging the door of the room wide open, that every one might see his condition. The footman, or whatever he called himself, fell back against the wall, and let me pass, which was the only wise thing he could do. Then I walked away quietly, and found my horse, and declining all talk with Mrs. Wilcox, rode back to Sunbury, with a great weight off my mind.

CHAPTER XII.

ANOTHER TRACE.

So far as my experience goes, it has never been an easy thing to find a man in whom the sense of justice is adjusted perfectly. That is to say, not overdrawn, nor strained to a pitch that is at discord with all human nature; neither on the other hand so lax and flabby, that it yields to every breath, and has no distinctive tone. Therefore I cannot expect to be approved by everybody for my recent act; but the glow of a tender conscience told me that I had not behaved amiss.

Yet the remembrance of my own rage, and utter loss of self-command, frightened me more than I can express; for a single word, a look, a gesture, even a flicker across my own will, would have made me then and there a murderer. What a thing for Kitty to hear—if ever she should hear of me again—that my

unhappy love of her had been cut short by the hangman! I formed the sensible resolve to keep out of Bulwrag's way henceforth, unless he should come to seek me; and then his blood must be on his own head.

At first I did not tell my Uncle of that brief but hot engagement; because, as I came to think about it, the folly of it dawned on me. For the fierce enjoyment of a minute, I had sacrificed all hope of tracing such faint clues as we had won, and I had shown the arch-enemy, in the most palpable form, my suspicions of him. This was unsound policy; and I was loth to confess it yet, lest my chief friend should be discouraged, as well as angry with me. However; the whole thing soon came out, and with so much more tacked on to it, that I was forced to recount the simple facts. But instead of being vexed, as in my opinion a truly wise man must have been, my Uncle shouted with delight, and shook his thick sides with laughter.

"So you pulled his nose! Kit Orchardson pulled the nose of the future Lord Roarmore, and the son-in-law of the Earl of Clerinhouse! Show me how you did it. This is too fine!"

"No. I scarcely pulled his nose. I cannot be said to have pulled his nose. All I did was

to take him by the nose, and he came after it wonderfully."

"I see, I see. He just followed his nose; and a lawyer could prove that there was no assault. A man follows his nose, without assault or battery. Well, I never thought you were so clever, Kit."

"Because I never boast," I answered calmly; and it struck him for the first time that this might be so.

"What will he do?" he asked; "whatever will he do? He can't very well put up with it; and yet how can he get satisfaction? You wouldn't fight him, I suppose, even if he deigned to ask you."

"I never thought of it. Let him try. He has done the wickedness. What I have done is nothing."

"Well, I think it was something good—the very best thing you could have done; much better than knocking him down, or even cowhiding him, as the Yankees say. How your Aunt Parslow will be delighted! She is coming over here to-morrow. You know what you put into her head. She will call on the Parson again about it. The poor girl is very ill; worse than ever. I hope he will agree to it."

"Aunt Parslow seems very fond of Sunbury now," I replied, with a curious glance at him; "why should she always be coming over here so?"

"You had better ask her. I dare say she can answer for herself. You must not expect to pull everybody's nose."

It had lately appeared to me, more and more, as if my Aunt Parslow were beginning to set her cap at my Uncle Corny; or rather—to put it more politely—as if he were doffing his wide-awake to her,—a wide-awake proceeding, no doubt, on his part, and a proof of capacity on hers; but not a thing at all to my liking, nor in any way savouring of those lofty feelings, which are so essential to wedlock. And without any mercenary motives whatever, or even a dream of self-seeking, I had felt (with good grounds for it) a delicate and genial interest in my dear Aunt's affairs. If after countless years of single-blessedness, she thought to double the rest by a joint-stock company, all I could do was to wish her well, and hope profoundly for her happiness. There were few better men than my Uncle Corny, and no woman better than my Aunt Parslow; and they might rub on together rarely, if each would let the other

rub, fair turn and turn about. But I feared that they scarcely had the give-and-take for that; and being both of strong metal, it would come to groans and sparks.

Nevertheless I must put up with events; and the little enquiry I had offered, as above, had not been received with gratitude. The surest way to bring this wild idea into fact, would be for me to show opposition to it. But I knew that Aunt Parslow was still romantic, as all women of true nature are. She had felt her own love-affairs in early days; but she would not want to think that Uncle Corny had felt his; and I resolved to let her hear of them by his own sighs; if he could be brought to sigh about anything but markets.

When she arrived, the next day, I saw that she was in fine spirits. But a little ashamed, as it seemed to me, of the exceedingly spirited dress she wore, quite as if she were going to the races. Moreover, she had brought *Jupiter*, as if to introduce him to some one who might influence his future life; and at this I ventured to express surprise, in a friendly manner, and with my hand upon his head.

"Oh, he does love a change, and it does him so much good!" she exclaimed, as if she had

been in her teens; "and I should like to hear what Mr. Orchardson think of him. He is a good judge of dogs, you said."

Alas, if one ever tells a story, how quick it is in kicking up its heels! In charity, I had said something of the kind, when I wished to make good will between them. Here was *Jupiter* come to prove me a liar, and perhaps to sway my destinies.

"Don't get out, with that lovely dress on," I said very craftily. "Let us go down to Mr. Golightly's; I know that you want to see him. I will jump on the box, and show Coachey the way. It will save you a lot of trouble."

Accordingly we drove on to the Parson's, and I went in to announce her. She had called upon him twice before, and he liked her, and was grateful for her good intentions.

He received us kindly; but we could see that his heart was in nothing he was talking of. He looked most sadly worn and thin, and his eyes fell every now and then, as a short low cough came from another room.

"And how is your sweet Bessy?" Miss Parslow asked; "you know she is quite an old friend of mine. What a favour you could do me, if you only would! I have taken such a liking to her."

"And she to you. I will go and fetch her. I fear you will find her looking very little stronger."

"Call this furniture! I call it hardware," my Aunt said in a low tone, when he had left the room; "no wonder the poor girl is all bones. Now back me up, Kit, about Baycliff. It is your prescription, you remember."

It was as much as my Aunt could do, being of a very kindly nature, to keep a smile upon her face, when the sickly girl came towards her. And the father looked from one to the other, and tried to make some little joke, but his eyes were sparkling with something else.

"You know what you promised me, my dear, if your good father would allow it;" Miss Parslow stroked her silky hair, and looked into her soft eyes, as she spoke; "and now everything is arranged and settled, I am sure you will not throw me over. The rooms are taken, and I cannot go alone; it would be so miserable for me. Your father will come to see you every week, and you shall teach him to catch prawns. And where do you suppose it is? Not at any strange place at all, but a place my nephew knows quite well, and the very same house that he was in. And he would come down, and be near us."

"Oh, that would be nice. I should not feel strange. Kit is so kind and gentle to me. I like to be where Kit is."

She came and placed her thin hands in mine; for I had become like an elder brother to her. She knew of my sorrow, and I of hers. It was not this world that she grieved to quit, but her father all alone in it.

It was a terrible pain to me, and almost more than I could bear, to find myself in this lovely place, without any love to respond to it. At every turn there was something to recall, at every view of gliding boat, or breaking wave, or flitting gull, some memory of a trifle said, and misery of having no one now to say it. But for the good of others I was forced to put these fancies by, for we could not have found another spot so suitable for the poor sick child. And as it proved, there was something even here to compensate me.

It had not been thought worth while to take any lodgings for me in the place, as I could not be spared throughout the week from the busy fruit season at Sunbury. Whenever I found time to run down to Baycliff, I could get a bed at the inn, and spend the day with my Aunt and her delicate charge. This suited me also much

better, because I did not like to be long away from the neighbourhood of London, where, as I always felt somehow, the strange mystery of my life must be cleared up, if it ever were so.

Mrs. Perowne was a very nice person, and deeply interested in our affairs. Kitty and I had lodged with her for a week, and although we could not afford to take her best rooms, she treated us exactly like first-floor people, and would have kept us for nothing, as she assured us, if only she could have afforded it. And now it rejoiced me to do her a good turn, by inducting my Aunt at three guineas a week, which was nothing for her to think twice of. Six of the Leatherhead dogs came down for the refreshment of their systems, and Miss Golightly was delighted with them, and spent half the day on the sands scratching their heads. The weather was all that could be wished, for we were come to the end of September now; and the summer as a whole had done its utmost to atone for the atrocities of the year before.

Mrs. Perowne and Miss Parslow now were as good friends as any two people can be, with money coming weekly between them. And they never spent less than an hour a day in talking of my loss and wondering. Till it

chanced that the landlady called to mind a little thing that happened after we had left her, and to which she had paid no attention at the time. But my Aunt considered it of some importance, and begged her to tell me all about it, the very next Saturday I should come down.

"Well, Mr. Kit," she said, upon the Sunday morning, for I had been too late on Saturday to see them; "it may have been a week after you were gone, or it may have been no more than one day, but at any rate there came to this house a very quiet gentleman, not over young, about fifty you might say, and not over tall, but about half-way between five feet and six feet, and he asked for you—Mr. Orchardson by name, and then the new Mrs. Orchardson. And when our Jenny told him that you were gone, he sighed, Jenny says—though you never must be certain of anything that Jenny says—just as if he had lost his pocket-book. And then he asked for me, and he was shown up here, the drawing-room floor being vacant, as you may remember; and I came up to see him, but I happened to be a little flustered, about having all the house on my hands so. And when I found that he was not even looking out for lodgings, perhaps I was a little short with

him. But whether or no, he did not push on with his questions as some people do. But he took up his hat, and begged me to excuse him for intruding upon my valuable time, and away he went with a very solid walk, and I was sorry afterwards."

"But what was he like? Can you at all describe him? Even his dress would help a little." I thought it most likely that this was the man who had come for my Kitty in Philip Moggs' boat, and taken her doubtless in Clipson's cab from Shepperton to Woking Road.

"I think I should know him, if I saw him again; but I won't be quite sure," replied Mrs. Perowne; "he was a gentleman I should say decidedly, though not in a fashionable cut of clothes; and I think he had gray hair, though I won't be sure, because so many people have that now. He looked highly educated, and his voice was very nice, and he wore a broad hat with a cord to it."

"Why, it must be the Professor himself," exclaimed my Aunt; "according to all I have heard of him, and according to your description, Kit. He came to see how you were getting on, and whether you and Kitty had fought yet."

"Oh, that reminds me of a curious thing;

and I thought it so odd," said the landlady; "he did seem to think that you must have quarrelled, or at least that there was something unpleasant between you. I remember now that he did quite well, because I was astonished at such an idea. For if ever there was a young couple suited — intended by the Lord for one another——"

"It cannot have been the Professor," I broke in, "for the simple reason that he must already have left the shores of England. We had a telegram from Falmouth proving that. And her father would never for a moment have imagined that Kitty and I had fallen out already. What did this man say, to show that he supposed it?"

"Well, I don't know that he did exactly that; but he inquired particularly about your health, or rather I should say your state of mind, as if you were not quite—you know what I mean—as if you were rather flighty, sir."

"Well, and so I am," I answered smiling; "a great many people would have flown off altogether, if they had been through half what I have. And now this again is another wicked puzzle for me. The only think certain is that I shall never find it out. I always come just a

bit too late. I hear of a thing when it is no good. I enquire of people, when they have forgotten everything."

This was rather rude of me; for Mrs. Perowne had done her best to assist me; and she could not be blamed for not talking by the hour with a stranger, about her late lodger's affairs.

"Did he say what he meant to do?" I asked, for really all these things were very tantalizing; "did he give you any idea why he should take such an interest in us? Did he ask where we were? Did he mention my Uncle? Did he go on, as if——"

"I am truly sorry, Mr. Kit, I am indeed. But I can't tell you another thing about him. And I am not sure that all I have told you occurred. Some of it may have come out of my own head. I can't carry everything, I can't indeed."

Mrs. Perowne was almost crying, and it was plainly useless to question her further. Such is evidence, even with people who are not fools, and who do their very best. Yet in a Court of Justice, an unhappy witness is badgered and insulted by some brazen-headed fellow, who could not tell a tale himself in its true order, if he had just read it in a spelling-book.

The only conclusion I could come to was that Mrs. Perowne's visitor and the passenger in the boat and cab, who had taken my wife away, were one and the same person, acting no doubt under Bulwrag's orders. But why he should have shown himself in the first case plainly, and made his second visit in that furtive manner, was more than I could even pretend to explain.

Another thing which I could not explain was of a different and delightful order. Rejoicing in the sea-air and in the sea itself, Bessy Golightly grew stronger every day. The wan delicacy and waxen clearness began to flush with a rosy gleam, her eyes looked darker and yet full of light; and her lips instead of drooping at the corners crisped their pretty curves with a lively smile. Miss Parslow was as proud as a hen that has struck an ants' nest, and took her to the China-shop every day to be admired, and to the Station to be weighed. And whenever her father came to see her, with "six hours allowed at the sea-side," he spent all the six in looking at her.

CHAPTER XIII.

A VAIN APPEAL.

"Possibly I might do something with him," said Mr. Golightly to me one day; "I have not much power of persuasion; but if I put a few simple truths before him, and showed him the wickedness of his present course, and how wanton is the injury he has done you, without even the shadow of good to himself, he might try even now to make amends. I can easily get an introduction to him. I suppose you would forgive him, if your dear wife were restored. It would be a noble thing to do."

"Too noble for me, I greatly fear. But he will never forgive me. If he hated me, when I had never harmed him, what is he likely to do now?"

As yet I had concealed from this conscientious pastor my recent act of rudeness, for I could not expect him to look upon it as the discharge

of a Christian duty. But now it seemed better that he should have the story from me, than from some one who might give an unkind turn to it. And he sensibly perceived that as the thing was done, it was useless now to remonstrate.

"It was not a magnanimous act at all," he replied with a grave shake of his head; "but allowance must be made for provocation; even Mr. Bulwrag must feel that, if he has at all a candid mind. I should not let that discourage me in the least, if you think fit to accept my services; and after all your kind acts to me and my dear child, it would be a very happy day for me—one of the happiest of my life, if I could really help you. Let me try, I entreat you; it can do no harm, and it may do good."

"You would only expose yourself to rudeness. He is rough and contemptuous in his manners, and has no respect for any one."

"His rudeness would not injure me. But I do not think that he would show any. I am well acquainted with a cousin of the lady, whom he seeks to marry. He was my churchwarden at Knightsbridge, and I became much attached to him. Mr. Bulwrag, for his own sake, will not be rude to any one so introduced."

This of course made a great difference; and as Mr. Golightly pressed the matter, I consented gratefully, though without seeing even the smallest chance of any good to come from it. However, it would enable me to hear something of that scoundrel, after whom I now began to feel a sort of stupid hankering; such as the young robin has for the cat; or the mallard on the mere about the strange proceedings of that dog among the reeds.

A more unpromising embassy might no man ever undertake; and having still some pride alive, in spite of deadly blows to it, I begged my reverend, and revered, as well as much beloved friend, to understand, and to make it understood, that he went as no envoy of mine, but simply at his own suggestion. "That shall be plain enough," he said; "he shall not even know that I asked your leave."

It must have been a strange and curious thing to see this encounter of two men, as different as any two men can be, and as far apart as heaven and hell. Not having been there I cannot describe it; and I could not have done so, if I had been present. But from what was told me afterwards, the result was much as follows.

Donovan Bulwrag received his unknown

visitor politely. He offered him a cigar, but whether in sport or courtesy was not plain, and then he said with his usual slowness, leaning back in his chair, and thinking—

"Sunbury, I think Sir Gilbert says; Sunbury a pretty village on the river. I know it a little, but I ought to know it better; for my mother's family lived there. And an aunt of mine—Miss Coldpepper—must be one of your oldest inhabitants. But owing to family circumstances, we do not see very much of her. How is she? I hope she supports the Church, as all people of property should do."

"The Church requires no support"—Mr. Golightly was always annoyed at the idea of the Church being patronized; "except what she has from above, Mr. Bulwrag, and from the proper zeal and gratitude of her dutiful children."

"To be sure. That is exactly what I meant. I trust that my Aunt is a dutiful child. But I know with sorrow that we do not all value our privileges, as we should. You find that the case sometimes, I fear."

"Too often, I regret to say, I do." Mr. Golightly was always grave with any one who spoke gravely. "But we do not restrict the opportunities of doing good to parishioners.

We have many useful institutions in our parish. Perhaps you would like me to mention a few. And if with your very kind feelings towards the Church, and anxiety about your Aunt's discharge of Christian duties, you should feel impelled to contribute, I happen to have the subscription-lists of six of the most meritorious, all in urgent need of funds; and I carry the receipt-forms in my pocket"

Downy was caught in his own net very neatly, and the Parson heard him mutter—"Confound that Sir Gilbert. This is a little too bad of him."

"Ah, I don't quite see. I am sure this is most kind of you—but with the many claims upon my small resources—perhaps it would be better to allow my mother the benefit of this opportunity."

"You must not blame Sir Gilbert. I did not come upon a begging errand. I intrude upon you for quite a different purpose. A sad and most mysterious thing has happened in our parish." Mr. Golightly watched him closely, to note the effect of every word. "A lady newly married to an excellent young man, of one of our oldest families, suddenly disappeared last May, and has not since been heard of."

"You need not tell me that. I know all about it," Bulwrag replied without any change of face, but in quite a different tone, and speaking quickly. "I could not help knowing it, considering that the girl's father was my mother's husband. She married without our knowledge, and is gone without it. My mother, who had been most kind to her, never met with such ingratitude."

"I do not intrude into family matters. I have nothing to do with that part of the case. I am here simply to discharge my duty. I come by nobody's suggestion. Only as the clergyman of the parish I feel myself bound to do all I can, to restore peace and happiness, and to right a great wrong."

"It is very good on your part, and I wish you all success. It would appear to be rather an affair for the Police. I am sorry that I have an important engagement. Would you like to see my mother on the subject?"

"No, thank you. My business is with you. I will speak plainly, and as an old man to a young one. All who know of this mysterious affair, believe that it is of your doing. Hear me out, and without anger, as I speak. If from some ill-will to either of those two, or for any

other reason of your own, you have contrived to part them, be satisfied now with what you have done. For many months now, you have caused the deepest misery, doubt, suspense, and almost despair. You have crushed two young hearts, which perhaps never will recover. You have desolated a simple, innocent, and tranquil home. Remember, I beseech you, what is manly, good, and just. I will not urge religion, because perhaps you have little sense of it. But even so, you know how short our time is here, and how paltry it is to injure one another. Even now, if you will do what is right, I will pledge myself that you shall be forgiven. Your share in it shall not be published to the world. You will have had more revenge than the bitterest foe can long for, and you will escape the penalty."

The clergyman urged that last point, because he saw whom—or rather what he had to deal with—a thing that could not be called a man. For during his description of our misery, he had detected a glow of fiendish exultation in the crafty eyes he was observing. This proved to him more clearly than if he had seen the deed, that the guilt lay on that brutal soul.

"It is a sad loss to us, my dear sir," replied

Bulwrag, looking at him steadfastly; "that we have not the privilege of living in your parish. Not only for the sake of the deep interest you feel in the private affairs of your parishioners, but also because you possess very largely that extremely rare gift—eloquence. I should be trembling in my shoes, if I had anything to tremble for. But knowing no more than you do, and perhaps much less, about this strange affair, I am simply astonished at your waste of words, and if you were not a clergyman, I should say—your impertinence."

"I have never been charged with impertinence before. Even if I am wrong, there is nothing of that about it. But if I have been mistaken, I have done you much wrong as a gentleman; and I will beg your pardon, if you will do this. Take a sheet of paper, and write these words—'Upon my honour as a gentleman, I have had nothing whatever to do with the disappearance of Kitty Orchardson. Signed, Donovan Bulwrag.'"

"It would be easy enough to do. But I do not choose so to degrade myself. If you think again, you will see that you were wrong, in proposing a thing so disgraceful. If you will not apologise without that, I must even put up

with your insult. I believe that you are a good man, Mr. Golightly, and deeply attached to your parish, sir; but impulsive, and hasty, and illogical. A fault upon the right side, no doubt; but too hasty, sir, much too hasty. I must beg you to excuse the same fault in me—for I cannot wait another moment."

When Mr. Golightly came back, he declared that but for that glow in Bulwrag's eyes, he could well have believed in his innocence. For he had never known any one meet a charge, when conscious of guilt, with such entire self-possession, and unfaltering readiness. And he feared that there was no such thing as mercy in his composition.

"He is a foe to be dreaded, Kit," he continued, looking at me sadly. "There is nothing, however bad, that he would stick at; he is resolute, calm, and resourceful. I have met with some men—not very many—in the course of my work as a clergyman, who seemed to have forgotten and foregone all the good, all the kind, all the tender part of the nature which God has given us. St. Paul describes such beings—one can scarcely call them human; and so from a different point of view does Aristotle. It is useless to deny that they exist,

although one would like to deny it—people in whom there does not remain one particle of good feeling to appeal to. Yet according to memoirs of some great Christians they have been such at one time. I will not deny it, though I have never known an instance. It is possible that by the power of Grace such an one may be converted and live, as a brand snatched from the burning; but——"

"But I hope Bulwrag won't be so at any rate. And I don't think there is much fear of it. I hope that he will have his portion——"

"Hush, Kit, hush! I pray you not to imitate him. Why is he as he is, but from indulging the evil part in early days, and famishing the better side? But I have brought you some news of your father-in-law, the learned and good Professor Fairthorn. You have looked in vain, I think, in that scientific journal, as it seems to be called, which you took in on purpose. I saw this quite by accident in *The Globe* as I came home; and although it cannot help you, I thought you might like to see it."

He handed me the paper, and I read as follows, among the short paragraphs of news received that morning—

"The steamship *Archytas*, as our readers may

remember, proceeded on a cruise of investigation and deep sea-soundings last April or May, being fitted out specially for that purpose by a well-known learned Society. Our Government, with its usual penurious system, has left all these questions of prime importance to our commerce and intercourse with the world, entirely to private enterprise; and we acknowledge with shame that we never could have laid a cable across the Atlantic, without the knowledge for which we are indebted to the broader and more enlightened policy of the United States. Unhappily these are now involved in an internecine struggle, which must retard for many years the progress of civilization; and we think that England owes a debt of gratitude to the learned association, which has thus stepped in to man the breach by voluntary efforts. Some uneasiness had been felt concerning the safety of this gallant band, which is under the charge, as we need not say, of one of our most distinguished savants, the well-known Professor Fairthorn; for no tidings of the *Archytas* and her gallant company had reached this country for many months. But we are happy to announce, in advance of our contemporaries, that the exploring ship was spoken, in latitude and longi-

tude not decipherable on the telegram—for it can hardly have been 361, and 758, which are the apparent figures—by the clipper-ship *Simon Pure*, which arrived at Liverpool last night. The *Simon Pure* took letters from her, which will be received with avidity, also instructions that any letters for the members of the expedition should be addressed to Ascension Island, if posted in Great Britain before the end of November. We hope to give further particulars shortly."

Without loss of a day, I took advantage of this opportunity, but rather as a matter of duty, than of hope or promise. And as my letter led to something, I will venture to insert it here, though a very old-fashioned production.

"My dear and respected Father-in-law,

"You will be surprised and shocked to hear that shortly after your departure, your daughter Kitty, my dear wife, left me apparently of her own accord, without a word of explanation, or any cause that I can even imagine. We had lived in perfect happiness and love; no cross word had ever passed between us; instead of growing tired of one another, we had become more and more united. I am well aware that

the home I could give her was not such as she, with all her attractions, might have aspired to. But she knew that, before she married me; and to all appearance she was perfectly satisfied, and as happy and lively as the day is long. And we had every hope, with kind friends round us, of improving our condition from year to year. And I say, on the honour of an Englishman, and on the faith of a Christian, that never, in thought word or deed, had I wronged her, or been untrue to her. In short, she was all my life in this world, and I loved her even to infatuation, and fondly believed that she loved me likewise.

"Yet on the evening of May 15th, 1861, when I returned to our cottage, at the time arranged, and in full expectation of finding my dear wife, she was gone without a single word; and from that day to this, although I have sought, and others have sought high and low, not a trace of her can be obtained, except as mentioned afterwards, and not a line has come from her.

"It is the deepest mystery I have ever heard, or read of; and when it will end, God only knows. She was much too sensible, and pure, and loving, to have left me thus for any trifle, or for the sake of any other man. Sometimes

I fear the very worst,—that she may have met with some fatal accident, or have been decoyed away and killed. But who could do that to my innocent Kitty? Surely not the vilest man ever born. My suspicions rest very strongly on a person well known to you, Donovan Bulwrag; but I cannot bring it home to him.

"We believe that we have traced my wife, after a search of many weeks, to Woking Road Station on the London and South-Western Line; but there all further clue vanishes; and we cannot identify, or even guess at the elderly man, who appears from our enquiries to have taken her thus far. My Uncle Cornelius Orchardson, and my Aunt, Miss Parslow of Leatherhead, have spared no pains or expense, in helping me in my hopeless search; but nothing comes of it, and I almost despair.

"I need not ask you, if you know anything which can throw any light on this horrible puzzle, to write to me immediately. But my hopes are very faint, because you were far at sea before it happened; as was proved by your kind message, received from the Captain at Falmouth, which my dear Kitty read with me, and for which I beg to thank you.

"With all good wishes for your success in

the important work you are engaged on, and hoping for your speedy return, I am with all respect and love, your unfortunate son-in-law,

"KIT ORCHARDSON."

After finding out how much it would cost, I posted this letter with my own hands; and the gloomy winter closed upon me, with nothing but its dreary round of heavy ponderings and lonesome work.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNCLE CORNY'S LOVE-TALE.

"A DISCONTENTED and sour man," said my Uncle Corny, one Saturday night when I had dropped into supper, "is as likely as not—unless he prays to God every morning of his life—to turn into a Liberal. I have known a lot do it, and being nabbed on the nail by the shady lot who are always near the corners, never get any chance again to come back into honesty. Kit, is that sort of thing going on with you?"

"Not likely," I answered, for my principles were sound; "is it likely that I would join a party including Lord Roarmore and his grandson? Conservatives commit no outrage."

My Uncle considered that statement gravely. He was too large-minded and candid of nature to accept it without the support of fact. He was probing his memory, to see if this were so.

"Well," he said at last, "there is some truth

in it; though it seems at first sight to go a little too far. I have known many very tranquil Radicals, and one or two Tories of an energetic turn. All I feared was that you might be driven by the vile wrongs you have suffered into that miserable frame of mind, when people are hatched into Radicals. They injured me, not quite so much as you, my lad, but bitterly, very bitterly. Yet I carried my principles sound through it all"

"Oh, Uncle, you promised to tell me the story of the wrong done to you, in your early days. I have often longed to hear it; but was afraid to ask you, because of the trouble it has been to you. But if you could bring yourself, without feeling it too much, to tell me how that matter was, it would be a great satisfaction to me, and do me a lot of good, I do believe."

"Well, my boy, it is a frosty night. How soon the year comes round again; though I do not think we shall have a winter fit to compare with the last one. But the east wind is coming up the lane pretty sharp, and we are likely to have a week of it. Let Tabby take the things away, and bring another log or two. You had better come down here, if the frost goes on. You will get frozen up there all alone."

"Not I. I can keep the fire up, and I believe it is warmer up there than here, because of the wind from the river. How glad I am Bessy is still at Baycliff. They never feel the cold wind there. But go ahead, Uncle, according to your promise; I don't know how many times you have cheated me. Tabby, look sharp, and go home before it snows now."

"Well, you must put up with my ins and outs. I can lay a tree in straight enough, but I am out of my line telling things. And you wouldn't believe, to see me now, that I was ever a brisk young chap, proud of the cut of his boots and breeches—for we used to wear no long slops then—and blushing at the mention of a pretty girl, and wondering what they were made of. But though you would not think it now, nor anybody else, except the young women that are dead and gone, I was quite as much the swell of Sunbury then, as you were before you fell into your bad luck; not so tall of course, but I dare say quite as strong, and the master of any lad about the village.

"Somehow or other, I was like you too, and your father as well for that matter, in not making up to any damsel in the place; although there were pretty ones then, I can tell you, as

pretty as any of the young ones now, and prettier too to my eyes, and ever so much modester and more becoming. But the Queen of the neighbourhood, in my opinion, ay, and of the county too, was Myra Woodbridge, the daughter of a farmer near Bedfont, who held land under Squire Coldpepper. If I was to tell you what she was like, you would think I was trying to put you out of all conceit with—with almost everybody in the world. And her looks, although they were so sweet and gentle, were not the best part of her, or not the only good one. A kinder-hearted, truer-hearted maiden never lived; and you could talk to her by the hour, without her being tired, or you either of what she had to say.

"Naturally enough, all the young men round about were hankering after this fair maid; and it did not go against her that her father was well off, having made a deal of money in the great war-time, by contracts for fodder for the troops, and so on. Myra was his favourite child, and pretty sure to come in for a good share of his wealth some day. She could play the piano, and sing like an Angel, and talk French, and keep accounts, and do anything. The difficulty was for me to get near her, till I

thrashed a young miller from Uxbridge who annoyed her, and then I thrashed two other fellows who were after her, for they never summoned people for such little matters then; and that made her begin to think kindly of me; and we used to walk by the brook, every Sunday evening.

"All was going on quite as well as I could wish, and old Robert Woodbridge was quite coming round to the coaxing of his lovely daughter, and the banns were to be put up just before the grass was cut, so that we might have our wedding-day between the hay and wheat—when suddenly everything was thrown abroad, and both our lives were spoiled for ever.

"Give me the sugar, Kit; I did think I should have some one to mix for me, in my old days—a faithful companion of many years, or perhaps a daughter, or a grandchild. But God's will be done. It is useless to take on.

"Squire Coldpepper's daughter, Monica, the younger of the two very handsome ladies, had taken a violent fancy to Myra; and now, when her elder sister Arabella was carrying on, against her father's will, with that dashing young buck—as they called them then—the

Honourable Tom Bulwrag, Miss Monica, who never cared much for her sister, any more than two firebrands rubbed together, she must needs send for my sweet Myra, to come and stay at the Hall, for some purpose of her own, whether to plot against her sister, or be company for herself, or what else, I cannot tell.

"Myra was very loth to go, for she knew the tempers she would have to deal with, and having a right pride of her own, she could not bear the way they treated her, partly as a friend, and partly as a servant—for she might not have meals with the family—and partly no doubt as a sort of go-between, or what they call a buffer nowadays. And being a mean lot, as everybody knows, their practice was to make her earn her keep by sewing and doing handy jobs about the house, like a servant without any wages. But whether she liked it or not, she must go, for her father durst not disoblige his landlord, that peppery Squire Nicholas.

"Unluckily, while she was in the house, that strange thing happened that I told you of. Tom Bulwrag was to have run away with the elder girl, Arabella; but when everything was ready she burst out about some trifle, and I am blest if he didn't make off with the other; thinking,

I dare say, how sweet she was for taking his side in the shindy. It was out of the frying-pan into the fire, and served him right, said everybody. If the elder was a firebrand, the younger was a Fury; and which is the worst, I should like to know?

"But they might have fought it out between themselves, and no harm done to good people, if Miss Monica had not carried Myra Woodbridge with her. She was forced to have some one perhaps, for her own sake, little as she cared for opinion; but one of the servants would have done as well, or better if she had been older. How Myra allowed herself to be taken, I could never quite understand, for it was not likely to help her father in the good graces of his landlord. Perhaps she thought herself in duty bound to stand by the one who was fond of her, or perhaps she hoped to see that things came right, and thought there might be a worse mess of it with no one of common sense to help; at any rate she went off in the chaise, and never had chance to come back again.

"You can understand what a storm there was at the Manor, when the truth came out. Our Miss Coldpepper had been locked up, and

could not get out till they found her; and then she was in such a state of mind, that she could not speak her meaning clearly. The runaways had at least six hours' start, and it was hopeless to go after them; and in those days there were only coaches, no railways, and no telegraphs. Squire Nicholas swore himself into a fit; and it shortened his days, as the doctors said, though he vowed he would live all the longer for it.

"Myra was of a gentle nature, as a woman should be; yet proud to resent any charge against her, when she knew she was innocent. The obstinate Squire, a pig-headed man, put all the blame upon her, or pretended to do it, to screen himself and his own lazy ways with his daughter. Till any one who listened to him would believe that the whole thing had been devised and carried out by a daughter of one of his tenants. So that when she wrote to her father—for the others left that job to her—to say that they were all at Bath, and doing as well as could be expected, Squire Nicholas sent a most thundering message, through old Robert Woodbridge, that Myra had better never come near Bedfont, or he would have her in prison for conspiring. Of course this was rubbish; but it

frightened the poor girl, and made her doubt what justice was.

"Then she wrote to me, a most pitiful letter, begging me to think the best of her—as if I could think anything else—saying how sorry she was for leaving home in that impulsive foolish way, under a mistaken view of right. Some day perhaps you will have a letter of that sort from your Kitty. And she asked me, as she could not ask her father (who would not forgive her till he saw her), to oblige her by just sending money enough to bring her back to Bedfont. 'I came away with only half a crown, and there is none to be got from you know who'—the poor thing said, for she was most careful not to write names that might lead to mischief.

"But like a woman, exactly like a woman, who thinks that the whole world knows everything about her, or else is afraid of their doing so, the only address that she gave was 'Bath, in the County of Somerset.' It was hard to send money by post in those days. You must enclose and risk it. But what was the use of putting money in a letter directed to 'Miss Myra Woodbridge, Bath'? There was nothing more precise in her letter to her father, and it

took me three days to find out that, for the old man was gone from home on business. I went to Squire Nicholas, to see if he knew, but he only stormed at me, and told me to go to—a place he was fitting himself for. So that four days were lost before I could start, with your Grandfather's leave, for the west of England.

"When I got to Bath, it took me two days more, as an entire stranger in the place, to find out where the Bulwrags had been stopping. And when I discovered their hotel at last, they had left it on the day before, and no one could tell me what their destination was. I came back to Sunbury in very bad spirits, fearing greatly that I never should see my dear again.

"And so it turned out; although I had one more letter from her, which was enough to break any one's heart almost. I have it upstairs, but I shall never show it. God only knows what a man goes through. When my time comes, you will find it, Kit; and I wish to have that, and the other, with me. There is more than a twelvemonth between the two; and the second is dated from a German city.

"I could not understand it at the time, because I had no more thought of any other woman, than you have since you lost your

Kitty. Aftewards I found out the whole. The poor girl became indispensable to them. She alone eked out their resources, and kept them from going to the dogs, before Bulwrag learned some roguish way of turning money. And to keep her from quitting them and going home, they lied through thick and thin to her, about her father and about myself, and backed up their lies with forgeries. They vowed that her father would never receive her; and that I was married to a Sunbury girl. Her father could make no enquiries about her, for he had been taken with a paralytic stroke; and her brothers, jealous wretches, did not want her nearer home. As for me, I could do nothing, any more than you can now. I knew that they were all upon the Continent, and trusted in her good faith and loyalty, for many a sad day. And although she had been deeply hurt and wounded at my silence, which of course had been twisted to their selfish ends, I believe that she was faithful to me, to the very last.

"The old man died on the very day when I received her second letter, and I went to his funeral with it in my pocket. The brothers looked askance at me, and smiled a sour smile, as much as to say—'You don't cut in for any of

it'—and I did not even speak to them about their sister. But they soon came to grief, by the will of the Lord; and the farm is now occupied by George Fletcher.

"In reply to that letter, which astounded me, I wrote to say that every word she had heard was false. That I had never forgotten her, as she supposed (although she did not reproach me with it); that I cared for no one else, and should never do so, and hoped from the bottom of my heart, that her illness was not so serious as she believed. If she would only write that she wished to see me, I would go to her anywhere in the world. Then I told her of her poor father's death, and that he had loved her always, and been yearning for her. She was on her deathbed, when she received that letter, and it comforted her dearly, and she died with it in her hand.

"Now what do you think my dear girl died of? It is almost too bad to tell you, Kit; and I can scarcely command myself to do it. I cannot prove it. If I only could—but vengeance belongs to the Lord in heaven. Slowly, but surely, it will fall; and a part is already upon them. Monica Bulwrag killed my Myra, not on the moment, but by slow death. That

was why she was so scared with you. That is the reason that her power passes into terror, when she tries to face any of us.

"That scoundrel, her husband, growing tired of his wife, began to pay attentions to Miss Woodbridge. He began very craftily, for like his son, he was cunning as well as furious; and the poor girl scarcely suspected it, or could not bring herself to believe it true. But his wife, knowing well what he was, saw through it; and you may suppose how her passion raged. She came in one day when they were together, Myra standing innocently by the window, Bulwrag gazing at her in his vile licentious way. That woman lost all self-command, at the sight. She strode up to Myra, and with all her weight and strength struck her on the bosom with her clenched fist. Myra fell backward and lay stunned upon the floor, her head being dashed against the sill as she fell. But it was not that which killed her; but the heavy blow on the chest, the most dangerous part of the delicate frame.

"No doubt, she would have left them, if she could, though she might have to beg her way home again; and she even left the house, but could not get far. There had been some fatal

harm done inside, by that blow of a brute beast; and the days of the best girl that ever lived were short in a land of strangers. She had trouble in breathing, and some fainting fits; a good doctor could have saved her, I do believe. But those brutes were afraid to have medical advice, even if they desired it. She pined away, and died. She did not care to live, until it was too late to do it. But she died in happiness. Thank God for that. She died with the knowledge that her father had been her father to the last, and that I had never failed her.

"Well, my boy, it was a bitter time for me; and my heart was full of fury, as well as anguish. But it is arranged for us, by a Higher Power, that these crushing strokes come upon us, from a mist. We know not the manner of their descending, we hope that they are not as they appear to be, we call up our faith in Heaven's justice to protect us, and we moan when it is useless. Nevertheless, for all of that, I believe that truth and equity are vindicated before we die, if only we live long enough. And if not, let us be content. We are fitter for another world, than those who have destroyed our life in this."

I saw that my Uncle had been overdone, brave, and strong-hearted, and stout as he was. People who complain, can support that habit; and a habit it becomes, never touching them inside. But he was of a hardy and courageous fibre; yet now he leant over his long pipe-stem, and his pipe had gone out, like the vapours of the past.

CHAPTER XV.

A COOL REQUEST.

It was natural that my hatred of that heinous race should be doubled. Violence and falsehood in the fiercer times, cunning and falsehood in these latter days had robbed two generations of honest Growers of all that they valued most on earth. No one, however light and careless, could help being struck with the strange resemblance between my Uncle's sad history and my own. It was now quite manifest why he had striven against my affection for Kitty at first, and then when he saw that it could not be checked had sympathised with me in the dark results. His wrongs must be avenged, as well as mine; and the sweet repose of Christian contentment must not be indulged in, till justice had been fed. The fatal point was that I could see no way; but the way was being paved for it, without my knowledge.

It was out of my power, and outside my nature, to play the spy upon anybody; but we managed through good Mrs. Wilcox to keep a sharp eye upon Downy Bulwrag. I rode up to see her at least once a week, fearing above all things that he might give me the slip, and be off to some foreign quarters, possibly even to my darling's prison. That she was immured in some out of the way place was now my settled conviction, and I pondered a thousand wild plans for roaming the world at large in search of her. The money would have been at my disposal, for Aunt Parslow was most generous; but where to begin was a boundless question, and where to end would have been endless.

The only thing possible was to wait; and the thing most reasonable was to hope, though impatience vowed it otherwise. The spring came back to a heavy heart, and there was no spring in my voice or gait.

One April evening I went down to the Halliford brook for watercress for my Uncle Corny's supper. He had not been very well of late, and fancied this, or disliked that, in a manner quite unusual with him. I was uneasy, and begged him daily to seek the advice of Dr. Sippets, but he only laughed, or bristled up, as stubborn as

a rusty nail in heart of oak. Then I told him not to smoke so much, and he replied by filling his biggest pipe.

I passed the place where I first had Kitty in my arms, a year and a half ago. Then all had been storm, and flood, and roar. Now all was calm, and sunny silence, broken only by the lapping of the brook. I leaned against the old carved stone, from which she had leaped into my embrace, and the budding shadows of the alder bush, like bars of sad music, stole over me. It seemed to me, in my disconsolate mood, that the young leaf had better shrink back into the bud, and the flower get quickly through its work, and die. But my thoughts were interrupted by a grating voice.

"Halloa, young man, you look down in the mouth! Not much luck for you in my house, by all accounts. Ah, that was a scurvy trick!"

I answered not a word, for I disliked the man, an ill-conditioned, evil-omened fellow—old Harker, who had meant to live rent-free for ever in Honeysuckle Cottage. He looked very shabby, and shaky, and uncombed, as if he slept in a hayrick, and washed himself with it.

"Ah, you wouldn't be quite so uppish, my brave young cock, if you knew all that I could

tell you. Give my love to old bonfire-raker. Hear he'll come to ashes himself pretty soon."

This was so mean and ungrateful of him, after all my Uncle's forbearance, that I seized him by the collar, as he stepped upon the bridge, and brought him back and made him look at me.

"Now, Harker, you'll just have the kindness," I said, "to speak out, like a man, what your meaning is. I am not going to hurt you, if you do the right thing. Otherwise you shall have a wash, and not before you want it. Out with it. Out with everything that you can tell me; though I don't believe there's much of it."

"Very likely not. And I would not say a word of it—such as it is—for any fear of you; but only because he has treated me shabby. Promised me five pounds, and only gave me one. That wasn't arkerate, you know. Why it hardly paid for shoe-leather. What will you give me, Master Kit, to tell you all I know of him, and all his tricks about you?"

"That depends upon what I find it worth. In the first place, who is the he you talk of?"

"As if you didn't know! Well you are a pretty muff, if you don't know when a man hates you. I have no love for you, mind, because of

the scurvy way I was treated; but I would not go out of my way to hurt you, without being paid for it. What will you give? You will be glad to know it; though I don't promise you it will help you much. I am always arkerate, I am."

I promised him a pound, if it should prove to be of value, or a crown if I could make no use of it; and although it could help me but little for the future, I considered it worth the larger sum, when I had heard the whole of it; because it cleared up so many little points which had puzzled me up to that moment. This man Harker, by his own confession, had been employed for weeks to keep close watch upon us, and report all our doings to Bulwrag. That demon discovered that this low fellow bore a grudge against us, because of his expulsion from the cottage; and what better spy could he wish for than one who had lived in the place, and knew every twig and stone? It is awful for a simple man (who lives without much thought, and says and does everything without looking round) to find that all his little doings have been watched, by an eye that was anything except the eye of God. We had kept a very distant sort of outlook upon Bulwrag; but that was

different altogether, and as a rogue he must long have been accustomed to it. To think that in our gardens (where every tree knew me, and the line of every shadow was known to me) I could not even move without somebody behind me, was enough to scatter all delight, and simplicity, and carelessness.

Harker told me all about the secret of the door into Love Lane. I knew that it was bolted, I was sure it had been bolted, I could almost swear that it had not been opened by any honest person from the inside, for a long time before Kitty vanished through it. It ought to have been locked as well, of course; as Tabby Tapscott (who had the true feminine knack of hitting a blot) observed. But now all that became plain as a pikestaff. That sneak of a Harker knew a dodge for undoing the bolt from the outside, by tapping on a sprung piece of tongued board, when the bolt (which was loose in the socket) would glide back.

I remembered what appeared to me a pretty turn of Kitty's, when I asked her to come and take a walk in Love Lane. "Not unless you seem to want it, my dear. We have our love inside, and it is not a gloomy lane." For she always loved fruit-trees, and fair alleys, and the

way one looks up at the sky through balls of gold.

However, that sort of thing was out of Harker's line; and I asked him a few questions, with a sovereign in my hand; at which he kept glancing, as a dog of better manners assures his master that he loves the hand ever so much more than the tit-bit inside it. He told me—for his mind was made up now—that he had suspected Bulwrag's scheme, but had nothing to do with the final stroke, except that he had opened the road for it. I conjured him by all that he valued—if he valued anything besides himself—to tell me where my dear wife was likely to be now, if indeed she were in the world at all.

He had no fine feelings to be appealed to, and having had a bad wife—his own fault, I dare say—could not at all enter into my concern. But he took a great weight from my heart by declaring that there was no fear of Kitty being made away with.

"'Tis a bit of revenge, and nothing more," he said; "the man is so deep and slippery that you can never circumvent him. You are a baby altogether to him. Although he employed me for weeks together, he never let me into any one of his devices. He never does

anything as you expect it. When you find out this, if you live long enough to do it, you will find it come contrary to all your guesses. If you ask what I think is the best way, I will tell you. But it might be quite wrong for all that, you know."

"Very well," he said, when I had asked most earnestly, and promised him five pounds, if it turned out well; "you just do this, and see what comes of it. Collect all your money, and get your Uncle to sell a good piece of his land for building, they are talking of that sort of thing, you know; and there is sure to be a Railway by and by, and the old Topper's land is the best in the parish. Then when you have raised a thousand pounds, take it in a bag, or a purse with open meshes, and lay it on his table —not too near him, mind—and then be very humble, and say, 'Mr. So and So, you have beaten me out and out, and I give in. You shall have all this, and I'll cry quits, and give you any undertaking you require, as soon as I get my wife back again.' It is my belief, Master Kit, that you would have her in a week; for that sort of man will do anything for money."

This was altogether a new view to me, and I

began to suspect things immediately. Possibly this man had even been sent to propose a bargain in this sly way. I could raise the thousand pounds, by selling out what I possessed; and my wife was worth more than all the money in the world, or even than my own life to me. But my pride, and sense of right, swelled against the low idea; and I knew that even Kitty would condemn so vile a bargain.

"If that is the only way to do it, it will never be done," I answered sternly; "but tell me one thing—did you see her go? Did you see the man who came to fetch her?"

"No. It was managed too well for that. They got all they could out of me, and trusted me no further. I did not even know that it was going to be done. I was ordered off to Hampton, on that very day."

Seeing some one in the distance coming towards us from the village, I gave the man his sovereign, and let him go, after learning where he might be found in case of being needed. And before I could even think the matter over, Mrs. Marker was crossing the planks towards me, dressed very prettily, and smiling at me pleasantly.

"What memories this spot does evoke!"

She had taken to rather fine language lately, and seemed to become more and more romantic. "Oh, Mr. Kit, Mr. Kit, is it possible that I meet you here again? Alas, I fear that you seek this spot, to heave the sad sigh, and to shed the briny tear."

I replied that I was only come to look for watercress, but was very glad to meet her; for we always had been friends, and perhaps she could tell me many things I wished to know.

"Whatever I know is at your command. My deep and heartfelt but unavailing pity has followed your fortunes for many a long month. Why the bridal morn seems but yesterday, so to speak; and yet a rolling year has passed over us since then! Robbed of your bride in less than half the honeymoon, and before she understood the price of sugar—you remember that she was to have laid it in cheap, second whites before it went up for preserving. Oh, Mr. Kit, we well may say inscrutable are the decrees of Heaven. But all shall be well yet, all must be well, if we trust in the Lord, and gird up our loins with trembling. Excuse the remark if too personal, but my heart does bleed for you. Any new light shed upon this dark dispensation?"

"That is the very thing I was going to ask you. But first of all, tell me, dear Mrs. Marker, are you convinced, are you absolutely certain, that my Kitty would never prove false to me?"

I never put this question to any of my own sex. But it always did me good to receive from a woman, who must understand women so much better, the strong confirmation of my own strong faith. To their credit be it said that not one of them refused it.

"Fie, fie! How can you ever bring yourself to ask the question? Though I am sure, I am not surprised, after all that has happened. But I will tell your Kitty of it, and we will have a laugh together. For the triumph of the wicked cannot last much longer. I suppose you have heard what the wretch is doing?"

"Not very lately. I was going to ask you. We were told in the autumn, by a lady who seemed to know, that everything was settled, and even the day fixed for his marriage with a very rich young lady, the only child of a very wealthy Earl? But it seems to hang fire, and I cannot discover that anything is settled even now. Do tell me what you have heard of it. Miss Coldpepper surely ought to know."

"I should think she ought, considering what

he has done. It appears that the lady is quite willing; she is under some foolish spell, and thinks him such a hero. But her father, though he seemed to give in at first, heard something, which induced him to change his mind. And now he insists, as is only fair, upon something being brought in by the gentleman as well. They are doing all they can to get over the hitch. And what do you suppose he had the impudence to do? He came down here about a week ago—drove down in a Hansom cab all the way; nobody was to know it of course, but I did; and then and there he had the face to ask his aunt to declare him the heir, and to bind herself to it, of all her estates and property. It quite took my breath away when I heard it—that any one should have such assurance. And after all that has happened in the family."

"A nice lord of the manor he would make. Did his mother come down with him?"

"Not she. He was too wide awake for that. The sisters can never be in one room half an hour without fighting. He went on about the honour of the family, and adding to the estates with the old Earl's wealth, and taking the name of Coldpepper, and I don't know what

else—for of course I was not there; but she told me of it afterwards, and she laughed very heartily I can tell you. 'It is a mere business arrangement,' she replied, 'and it must be done in business form, if at all. Write to my Solicitors on the subject, proposing exactly what you have proposed to me. Give your reasons for wishing that it may be settled so, and add that there could have been no occasion for it, if your mother had not run away with your aunt's lover, after locking her in a dark hole where she might have died. You may be quite certain of my consent, as your mother was, when she turned the key on me. Don't let me detain you, for fear of losing time. Solicitors are never very rapid in their work.' He could scarcely have been disappointed, but Charles said he did look savage, when he showed him out. And now, what do you think his next card is?"

"How can I tell? Perhaps he'll come to Uncle Corny, and ask him to sell his garden, and settle it upon him."

"You are not so very far out after all. Your Kitty has a very rich aunt in the north—no relative of his in any way, not even a connexion, for she is related to Kitty on her mother's side.

But she has the reputation of being rather soft, and so off he goes without telling anybody. But we heard of it; we hear a great deal more now; because we've got a maid whose sister lives there, and waits upon the two young ladies who are always chattering about their brother; and our Mary can't do without her Anne, for more than a week, because they are twins. Every Sunday our Mary goes up to the Park, or their Anne comes down to the Manor. And perhaps you may know what ladies-maids are, Mr. Kit. They really seem to take a deeper interest in the family they serve than the one they belong to. So we know all the young ladies know, and perhaps more than their mother knows; for being so masterful she has things kept from her, as is only natural. And I can tell you one thing, Mr. Kit, which you won't be sorry to hear perhaps, or at any rate didn't ought to be. Mr. Downy Bulwrag is in some trouble; not about money I mean, but something worse, or at any rate deeper than money is. His sisters know this; but they don't know what it is, or else they are afraid to speak of it."

I thought of Tony Tonks, and the man called Migwell Bengoose, who appeared to Tony to

be an English sailor, fallen into foreign ways; and I thought it very likely that he might have brought bad news.

"He goes away at night," continued Mrs. Marker, "without a word of notice to anybody, and he sneers, or is grumpy, if they ask him about it; and he has been seen with very shabby-looking people, though he used to be so particular about that. And he carries one of those new-fangled pistols, that go off a dozen times with one load, and every one is afraid to go near him almost, because of his temper and all that. From all I am told, you may depend upon it, he is not enjoying himself, Mr. Kit, so very much more than you are. And that is not very much, to go by your face; sorry as I am to see it, sir, after saving me from the jaws of death."

"Nonsense, Mrs. Marker; you saved yourself, by your presence of mind, and a light young foot."

"You say things beautifully, Mr. Kit. It was always your gift as a child, I have heard, though not old enough here to remember it. And now, sir, remember that you have one good friend, who will never be happy, till you are. A feeble friend, but a warm one, and able

perhaps to do more than you think. Nothing shall go by me that you ought to hear of. Good-bye, sir, good-bye. Everything will come right, and you shall pay me, for telling your fortune."

CHAPTER XVI.

ALIVE IN DEATH.

Downy Bulwrag was indeed in trouble—not brought on by his evil deeds, as good people might have imagined; or at any rate not so caused directly, according to present knowledge, although in the end it proved otherwise. It had seemed an astonishing thing to me, considering his haughtiness and shrewd perception, that he should have deigned to expose himself to that quiet rebuff from Miss Coldpepper. And then that he had gone upon another quest of money, even more humiliating, showed that there must be some terrible strait, some crushing urgency in his affairs.

He was not a man who lived extravagantly; he was rather of the mean and close-fisted order, even in his self-indulgence. From what had been said at Sam Henderson's dinner, it would seem that he had fallen into certain racing

debts; but I could not believe that these were crippling him, for he generally managed to work them off, and come out with a balance in his favour. But there was another thing in the background, of which I had no knowledge yet; and when I speak of it now, it must be understood that I do so from later information.

That account in the *Globe*, which the clergyman showed me, had been followed by further particulars in the Journals of the following day, and by one or two extracts from private letters brought to England by the *Simon Pure*. But the ships had been parted by a sudden gale, after a very brief interview, and some despatches, which were not quite ready, had lost their chance of delivery. There was nothing of interest to me, except what I had seen at first; and no letter from the Captain to my wife arrived by post, which surprised me for the moment. But that was explained by the likelihood that he might have been hurried with official reports, while intending to send his private letters with them, and thus had lost the chance of despatching either. And as any such letter must have missed its mark, there was no great disappointment.

But the *Simon Pure* landed near Liverpool,

as I came to know long afterwards, an unhappy and afflicted man, welcome to no person and to no place on the face of the habitable globe. An elderly man of great bodily strength, and bulk of frame, and large stature, he had better have gone beneath the earth—as the father of poets has it—than linger on it, lonesome, loathsome, shunned, abominated, and abhorred.

His sins had been many, and his merits few; he had lived for his own coarse pleasures only; he had never done good to man, woman, or child; yet he might have called any man worse than himself, who refused to grieve for his awful grief—for this man was a leper.

The captain of the *Simon Pure* was humane as well as resolute. This Spaniard, as he called himself, had lurked under a tarpaulin, till the boat of the *Archytas* was far away, and the gale began to whistle through the shrouds and chains. Then he came forth and showed himself, holding forth his hands, defying the sailors to throw him overboard. For a month he had been treated well by the crew of the exploring ship, who were all picked men of some education, and ready to listen to reason. He had managed to quit them without their knowledge, and cast his lot among a less enlightened crew.

The boldest feared to touch him, but with nautical skill they encoiled him in ropes from a distance, and were just beginning their yo-heave-oh chant, when the captain rushed up and dashed them right and left. With his own hand he unbound the leper, and led him forward, and allotted him a place on the forecastle, where none might come near him, except to bring him food, and where he must abide, if he cared to live. His chief desire was to get back to England, and finding himself well on the way for that, he indulged in strange antics, and shouted and roared, as if all the ship belonged to him. When the moon was high—for the moon appears to have strange power over those outcasts—the sailors were afraid to keep the deck, with his wild songs flowing aft to them; for he had belonged to a colony of Indian lepers, and had learned their poetry.

As soon as the ship was in the Mersey, he contrived to be quit of her. Perhaps he was afraid that his condition would be made known to the authorities, who might find it their duty to observe him, though they could not legally confine him. At any rate he escaped any such trouble, by dropping into a boat, and landing on the south side of the river. A purse had

been made for him by the sailors, not a very heavy one, for they were short of cash, but enough to carry him to London—at once the fountain and the cesspool of diseased humanity.

Donovan Bulwrag had been unable, after his recovery, to put up with the control and order of his mother's house in Kensington. He had taken private rooms again, in a little street near Berkeley Square; and though his mother was not well pleased, she had now to contend with a will as strong as her own, and even firmer. He must have his own way in this, he must be indulged at every cost, rather than driven to mutiny when all depended on him. If once he were married to Lady Clara, all would be wealth and prosperity. She had hoped to see it done ere now, but a wicked chance had crossed her.

It was nearly twelve o'clock one night, towards the end of February; and Bulwrag, having returned from his Club much earlier than usual, was sitting by the fire in his dressing-gown, with a cigar in his mouth and a bottle of very old Cognac on the table. He was not in a pleasant humour, for the luck had been against him, and foreseeing worse he had come away, for he was growing superstitious.

He was dwelling gloomily on the dull necessity before him—the "brilliant prospect," his mother called it, but he disliked his intended bride; and this good thing (alone perhaps) may be said in his favour—he was not wholly mercenary. I would fain hope, though without much faith, that he may have felt some true regret at the cruel wrong he had done me—for verily the expiation was nigh.

Suddenly the front-door bell rang sharply, and the poor weary maid shuffled down the stairs. She had told him, when he came in that night, that a tall strange-looking gentleman, with his face muffled in a white cravat, had called about nine o'clock, and left word that he would come again that evening. He had given his name as "Senhor Diaz," and Bulwrag, after wondering vainly, concluded that it must be some one connected with the sailor Migwell, whom he had seen in the autumn.

Slow heavy steps approached his door, and the maid was dismissed with some gruff words in a foreign language quite unknown to Donovan. Then the door was opened without a knock, and a big man stood and looked at him.

"Who are you? And what do you mean

by coming at this time of night?" Bulwrag spoke in his roughest tone, for the man was shabby and repulsive.

The visitor coolly took a chair, handling it in a peculiar manner, for he seemed to have bags on, instead of gloves. Then he crossed a pair of gigantic legs; and Bulwrag saw that he wore no boots, but loose slops of hide with the hair on, in size and shape much like the nosebag of a horse. His hat was flapped over his ears and forehead, and he spoke not a word, but gazed at Downy with large red eyes, having never a hair of lash or brow to shade them. Bulwrag shuddered, and drew his chair away; he had never been looked at like this, and could not meet it.

"In the name of the Devil——" He could get no further; for the eyes of this monster, and the strange formation under the cloth, where his face should have been, declared that he was laughing.

"You have learned to swear. Valedon—very good"—the voice sounded dead through the mufflings, and the accent was not like an Englishman's—"Chip of the old block. I was famous for that, at your age, young man."

"What do you know of my age? Who are

you? What are you? What brings you here at this time of night? What do you want me to do for you?"

Even Downy Bulwrag was hurried and confused, and lost his resources in the presence of this man; and a fearful idea made his blood run cold.

"Ha, he knows me not. He is not a wise son"—the stranger still kept his red eyes on him—"where is the voice of nature, that I am compelled to introduce myself?"

"Speak out. Do you mean to stop here all night? Don't cover your face up, like a thief. In the name of God, who are you?"

The stranger slowly uncovered his face, sliding the bandage from his cheek-bones downward, with a clumsy movement of his bagged hands; then he rose to his full height and stood before the gas, and looking no longer at Bulwrag, waited to be looked at by him. His face was transformed into that of a lion.

"You must go to a hospital. Don't come near me. Pull it up again, for God's sake."

"It is God who has done it, if there is a God. And why should a man be ashamed of it? Embrace your father—as the Frenchmen say—in a few years you will be like him."

"Don't come near me, I tell you again. I have a revolver in this drawer; none of your pop-guns, but a heavy bullet. I don't want to hurt you, if you will only go away."

"My son, I do not intend to go away. It grieves me to hear you speak of it. Surely you never would cast off your father, for such a sweet trifle as leprosy."

Bulwrag began to recover himself, which was more than most men of his years would have done. Nature had not endowed him with the largest head in London, without putting something inside it. His sitting-room was small, and plainly furnished, but having been used by convivial men, it possessed a long table (now set against the wall) which would slide out to still greater length with levers. He drew this across the room, extended it, and closed the gap at the end with the one in common use. Then he threw up the window at his side of the room, after fastening back the curtains, and requested his visitor to throw up the other; for the house was a corner one, and the room had "cross-lights."

"Couldn't do it, my son. Would you like to see my hands? No? Very well, you must take them upon trust. I have three fingers

left, but the spot is upon them. However, you are a brave fellow, so far, though infected with popular ignorance. Nine men out of ten would have rushed away, shouting 'Murder!' But you may put away your shooting-irons, as the Yankees call them. A hole in my body does more good than harm, under the circumstances. Once for all, my complaint is not contagious, or at any rate not among well-fed people; and you are well fed, if ever anybody was. Give me a cigar; you will do that gladly, for your own interest, I dare say. I can smoke it, with my bandage on. Now a glass of good brandy —no water with it. You may break the glass afterwards, if you think proper, as the fools did on board the *Simon Pure;* but never in the *Archytas.* Ah, that was a ship of science!"

"The *Archytas?* Do you mean to say you have been in her?"

"Without her, and her glorious Captain, my son, you would never have seen your beloved parent. And more than that, if there had not been a beautiful young lady on board that ship, I should never have been here. Ah, you may well be surprised to see me. If ever any man has been knocked about—seventeen wounds I could count, till this affair took five away.

And one of them laid me five years by the heels, laid me under ground, it was said everywhere. I suppose you heard that I was dead."

"Yes, and on very good authority too. But I was too young to know much about it. Do you know what has happened in the family?"

"Ah, the Spaniards are the men for proverbs. 'Believe no man dead, till he comes and proves it.' But women can always believe what they wish. Curse the woman, she has caused all my troubles. But wait a little longer."

The deep thick voice, and the glare of his father's eyes, made Downy tremble. "Surely you will not—in this condition—you will go to a hospital, and get cured—you will leave the management of things to me."

"Will I? No doctor in the world can cure me, or lengthen the months of my rotting away. And I got it by goodness, I took it by goodness. If I had stuck to my nature, I should have been sound. No more goodness for me in this world, and none in the next. Can a leper go to heaven?"

For a while they sat silent, the old man puffing the smoke through his muffler, and lifting the glass between his great wrists every

now and then; the young man absorbed in this awful puzzle, with his vast head drooping on his breast. It had never even crossed his mind to ask whether this man might be an impostor. He felt that every word was true; and now what possible course remained for him? At length his father spoke again.

"Come, cheer up, my hearty, as the sailors said to me, though they took care to say it a long way off. You don't seem delighted to have found a father, and a man of such renown and rank. Why, I am the Marquis of Torobelle, and you are the heir to the title. Lord Roarmore doesn't sound much after that. But alas, I have nothing to keep up the title, and I dropped it among the Indians. I shall have to trouble you a little in that way; one cannot live on glory. Oh, but they treated me infamously, when I could do no more for them. They drove me across the Rio Negro into Patagonia, and paid a tribe of the wandering Indians never to let me back again. They passed me on to the Moluches, and I tried to make my escape from them, but was caught and left for dead again, till a woman took pity on me. Then I married her, and lived on putrid fish with a roving horde of the Eastern Tribes, in a miserable

country, where no white man goes. Then I took the disease from the diet and the nursing of my poor woman in her illness, and for five years I was shut up in the leper's den—as they called a reeking peninsula, which explorers know as Saint Jacob; at the back of a place called the Bottomless Pit. There was no getting out; there were thirty of us, sometimes more, and sometimes less, sometimes we got victuals, and sometimes we starved, and I was the only white man there.

"Although we were quite close to the sea, and almost surrounded by it, we were far away from all chance of ships, on a desolate barbarous coast in a curve a hundred leagues out of the line of traffic. And there I must have wasted into a sandy skeleton, for there was no possibility of escape inland, unless a good angel had been sent to fetch me. For the ship was taking soundings, or something of the sort, having come far away from the usual course, to find the truth about the bottomless gulf; and all I could do would have gone for nothing, except for that young lady. They were giving us a wide berth, as if we all were savages, when luckily for me she brought her spy-glass to bear, and declared that she saw a white man

among the rest. The others laughed at her, for you may be pretty sure that there was not much white about me just then; but she stuck to it, and ran for the Captain, and insisted that a boat should be sent to see about it. Oh, I could worship that girl, I could; though it isn't much good to me, after all.

"Come, you ought to say you will take care that it is, and devote all your days and your money to the welfare of your persecuted parent. You must have expected me long ago, or at any rate had some hopes of it, for I sent you a message several years ago, and some documents too from Mendoza, before I was banished finally. A knockabout fellow swore to find out all about you, and deliver them the next time he was in London. Do you mean to say he has never done it?"

"Not till last autumn; and as it was so old, I thought nothing more would come of it. A sort of half Englishman, half Spaniard. But a faithful fellow, and thought wonders of you. When he first came with your message, he got into a scrape before he could deliver it. He stabbed a man at the Docks, and had to bolt again, and he fought shy of London for years after that. But to see you like this was the

last thing I could dream of. You said not a word of this, in your letter."

"Because I had not got it then. I took it from misery and starvation, and living among the savages. Ah, I have seen a good deal of the world, and met with some wonderful people. How small even London seems to me!"

"Yes, I dare say; and how small the world is! You could tell many a tale no doubt, but none more wonderful than your own. Do you know who it was that fetched you off—the Captain of the *Archytas?*"

"Give me more brandy. It is good enough for that." The great stranger shook himself—though he might have had more manners—and his clothes rattled round him like mildewed pea-pods. "I knew nothing about it, at the time, of course; but since I came here I know everything. Why, it was the man who stepped into my shoes, and a devilish sight too good to do it. Ah, he has had his hair combed, once or twice, I doubt. Better almost have turned leper at once. How good he was to me! No haughty airs, no shudders, no 'keep your distance, dog!' He was not at all sure about contagion, till he looked at his books in the cabin. But it made no difference to him. He could not tell who I

was; he took me for a Spaniard—'Diaz' was the name I went by—but he treated me as a Christian, as Christ himself would have treated me."

The poor man lifted his hat, as he spoke, from his naked yellow head, and the glare of his eyes was clouded. The power to weep was gone, but not the power of things that move to it.

"And he did a good work for himself," he resumed, looking fiercely again at Downy; "he did himself a better turn than me, without knowing anything about it. Every one of my troubles has been through that woman. She never knew what a man's wife is. She wanted to be man and woman too. The Pulcho Indians would have taught her something. Top-knot come down. Your husband is a leper, and the man you have eaten up for years goes free. I am only waiting till the proper time comes. I have had a fine time of it; and so shall she."

"But I suppose you don't want to hurt your children;" Donovan spoke in a surly voice, for he saw that this man was not one to be soothed; "what harm have your children ever done you? By appearing now you would simply starve us; and what could we do to help you then? You

have been in London for weeks, I dare say, and you have learned all you could about us. Did you learn that we are living in Fairthorn's house, and on Fairthorn's money? And what becomes of that, when you turn up? Did you learn that I am likely to marry a lady of great wealth and good position? What becomes of that, if you turn up? You have not let my mother know a word as yet?"

"Not I. Not a syllable yet, my son. What a strange thing it seems to have a son again! No, I don't want to hurt you, or the two girls either. I have managed to get a look at them. How they would have stared, if they had guessed it. I consider them to be a credit to me, and I hope they are better than their mother. And you are a credit in a certain way —a strong, plain-spoken fellow. Not much humbug about you, I should say. And of course, I can't expect much affection. But I dare say you are sorry about your poor father."

"Father, I am. I am broken down about you. I have always thought well of you, and made allowance for you."

"God knows that I have wanted it, my son. I will do all I can to help you now. I will live in some hole, and not show myself, for a time.

But only for a time, mind you. My revenge I will have, when it can't hurt you so much. But you must give me money, to support me till that day. What will you pay, and how long will you want?"

"Three months, perhaps four; and pay two pounds aweek. It is all I can afford, for I am awfully hard up. After my marriage, five pounds, if you like. Give me your address. You can have two weeks' money now. It is all I have by me. But don't come here again; these people are very suspicious. I will arrange to meet you somewhere."

The poor cripple managed to take the money, and after a few more words departed. Then Bulwrag flung the other window up, cast the tumbler out of it, and lighted some pastilles. Then he took a draught of brandy neat, and went upstairs to sit in his bedroom, and brood over this calamity.

CHAPTER XVII.

ZINKA.

Of all those things I had no knowledge, till it came upon me suddenly; except that I heard from time to time, both through Mrs. Marker and Mrs. Wilcox, and even Miss Coldpepper, that Donovan Bulwrag was going on strangely, and no one could understand him. He was in such a state of mind that even his mother feared to cross him, and his sisters were afraid to ask him anything about it. And no one could tell what his motive was; but all agreed that he was now as anxious to marry Lady Clara, as he had been careless about it last year. This—as so often seems to happen—diminished the ardour of the other side, and the Earl insisted more and more that he should bring something solid into settlement. The estates of his Grandfather, Lord Roarmore, were heavily incumbered, and that ancient nobleman himself, now ap-

proaching his ninetieth year, was almost incapable of business.

Though I had been terribly afflicted for a year, without the satisfaction of deserving it, there was one thing beyond denial, to wit that I had met with most wonderful kindness from friends, and neighbours, and the world at large. If any one says to me henceforth that there is no such thing as good feeling, or good will, and that everything is selfishness, I shall tell him that he judges all his neighbours by himself, and I wish to hear no more of him.

And now when the fatal day came round, which would fill up the twelvemonth of my misery, no less than six people were thoughtful enough to give me the offer of being from home, when it must be a bitter home to me. Uncle Corny, Aunt Parslow, and Mr. Golightly, Sam Henderson, Mrs. Wilcox, and Widow Cutthumb, all entreated me to come to them, if I did nothing more than hear them talk. Mrs. Marker, if she had lived in her own house, would have added her invitation; and Mr. Rasp the baker—though now getting on, almost beyond recognition—got his wife to write to me, and say that they would have a little card-party in the evening.

But there were too many young ladies there

for me, to be seen in the shop behind jam-pots, in a style we could never enter into; and if I had meant to go to any place at all, that would have been the last of them, because I should have felt what Kitty would be thinking—"Well, he does enjoy himself, without me!"

"Come to the Derby," Sam Henderson said, meaning it all for my good, no doubt; "and see old Chalks win with *Nutmeg-grater*. He is at 40 to 1—makes it all the surer—the finest foal my old *Cinnaminta* ever threw. Quite a moral, my son; I shall make four thou. Get on, while you can. Kept him dark as night. Tony came sniffing, but we gave him snuff. Before the flag falls, he will be at 4 to 1. Invest, my son, invest, if you wish to tool your Kitty in a four-in-hand."

"Sam, you are up, or you would not talk so." He saw that he should not have said it, and was dashed.

"Well, old fellow, I beg your pardon. But as sure as a horse has got four legs, you will have her back again within four months. Lay you ten to one, in fivers."

"Do you think I would bet about a thing like that? Sam, you are a good friend; but this is not like you."

"Only wanted to keep your pecker up. The pluckiest fellow gets in the dumps sometimes. Never take it crusty, when a cove means well. Sorry you won't come to us to-morrow. Sally gives a rare spread at nine o'clock. But every man knows his own ways best. I shall look you up, on my way home. Expect to have some news, but won't bother you till then. Good news, fine news for you, Kit."

He spoke to his glossy little nag, and was off, before I could ask him what he meant. And I said to myself that it could only be some nonsense, to keep my spirits up.

The day of my trouble, the 15th of May, happened to be the Derby day that year, and our quiet little village was disturbed with joy. Every one who could raise a pair of shafts, or even of shanks, was agog right early, and I heard their shouts over my Uncle's wall, while they set forth as merry as Londoners. I resolved not to leave my work all day, except for a crust of bread and cheese, that there might be no room and no time for moping, which sits on our laps when we cross our legs. But when it grew dark, and I went home alone, I tried in vain to whistle, and my heart felt very low.

What was the use of keeping up? It was only a sham and a self-deceit. Ten years were as likely to go by as one, without bringing any consolation to me. All the prime of my life must pass in sorrow, empty, mysterious, lonely sorrow. Perhaps when I grew old, and could care for no one, having no one to care for me, when it mattered very little how my life was to finish, the matter might be cleared up, all too late. Even my Uncle Corny's trouble, heavy, incurable, and lifelong as it was, seemed light in comparison with mine; because all its history was manifest, and all suspense was over. How much longer must this misery drag on? If my Kitty were not dead, she must have come back long ago. Or perhaps she had forgotten me, and married some low villain.

"*Nutmeg-grater*, *Nutmeg-grater*, *Nutmeg-grater* for ever!" Two merry fellows were shouting for their lives, as they walked in wavering latitudes among the flowering pear trees.

"Let me tell him." "No, I'll tell him." "What do you know about it?" "Why you never saw him, in your life." My heart gave a jump, for I thought it must be some grand news, by this fuss about it.

"Right you are, Kit. Right you shall be. *Nutmeg-grater*, and Kit for ever!" they shouted as they saw me sitting in the dusk, on a big flower-pot outside my door. "Shake hands, old fellow; shake hands, here he is. He knows all about it. Major Monkhouse, let me introduce you. Mr. Kit Orchardson, Major Monkhouse, the two best fellows in the world together, and *Nutmeg-grater* is the third."

I saw that Sam was a little in advance of his usual state, and the Major not behind him. They were flourishing their hats, full of skeleton dolls, and striking attitudes, and spinning round now and then against each other.

"What are you come to tell me, gentlemen? Is it about the race?" I asked, trembling to think it must be something more.

"The race be d—d!" cried Major Monkhouse, one of the most courteous of men, when sober, as I discovered afterwards. "As between man and man, sir; as between man and man, you know——"

"The Major's hat is full of money," said Sam, as if his own were empty; "when that is the case, a confounded good fellow is better than ever, sir—better than ever."

"Shake hands," the Major shouted; "Sam,

shake hands!" And he took mine by mistake, but it made no difference. "You have such a manner of expressing what you call it—equal honour to his hands and head. This gentleman must not mistake my meaning. Mr. Archerson, excuse me, you understand my sentiments. You might ride him, sir, with a daisy-chain."

"Sit down, gentlemen." I was trying to be patient, and thought that the safest position for them.

"Not a drop, Kit, not a drop, my good fellow. I am all but a total abstainer now. And as for the Major, why, his doctor tells him——"

"No good, sir, no good at all. 'Dr. Bangs,' I says, 'you may be right; but you don't catch me taking any of your confounded stim—shim—shimmulers.' Sam knows how hard he tried; but it wouldn't do, sir."

"Oh, but you were come to tell me something. I thought you came out of your way on purpose—something of importance to me?"

"Right you are, Kit, right as usual. There never was such a boy to hit the mark. Set you up, Kit, set you on your legs again—no more poking, no more potting, no more pottering under a wall, no more shirking the Derby—

mind you, a d—d ungentlemanly thing to do. Why we wouldn't have known it but for that!"

"Never should have seen her, without that," said Major Monkhouse, solemnly; "put away too secretly among the lost tribes. Ah, she is a stunning woman!"

"Now will you tell me what you mean?" I felt that I should like to knock their tipsy heads together; "this may be a very fine joke to you. But no excitement excuses it."

"Excitement! Cool as a cucumber, sir;" cried the Major, with a countenance by no means cool, "I should like to know what you mean by that insinuation."

"Leave it to me, Major; leave it all to me. Our friend Kit is a little hasty," said Henderson, whispering to me—"Don't mind him, a very grand fellow—but has had too much. Major Monkhouse, it is our place to make every allowance for married men. They never know very well what they are about."

'By George, sir, you are right. Mr. Archerson, shake hands. I honour you for your integrity, sir. Sorry for you, very sorry, and apologise with candour. Every Englishman adds to his self-respect by that."

"How he puts things! It comes of being in the Army. Now go to sleep, Major, it will do you a lot of good, while I tell friend Kit all we have been doing for him."

By this time my hopes were reduced to proper level, and I had ceased to glance through the trees behind them, in search of somebody who might never come again. For these two men had come in with such a flourish, that the wildest ideas ran through me.

"A drop of ice-cold water from your pump," said Sam, "and then I'll tell you something that will please you. My coppers are hot, because I have taken next to nothing; and the dust—you should have seen it! You have heard of the celebrated Zinka, haven't you, the most wonderful creature that was ever born? Well my dear friend there, the very finest fellow that ever stepped this earth, sir—don't deny it, Major, but go to by-by—I met him at the Corner on Monday, Kit; and old Pots was there, and that made me talk of you. 'Tell you what,' he says, 'let us see the great Zinka. She can't help being there on Wednesday. It is the only day in the year, you can catch her; but the stars always bring her to the Derby. If he won't come, you bring some-

thing of his, something he has worn, or had about him. If it is bad news, why we need not tell him, and if it is good, why it will be new life to him.'

"Of course I jumped at it, and it shows what a fool I am that it had never occurred to me. Zinka is the Queen of all the Gipsies, although she is only five and twenty, the most beautiful woman on the face of the earth. Don't tell Sally that I said so. Why she is Cinnaminta's daughter, that my old mare is named from. So you may suppose that she knows everything. If we could only get her to spot the winners for us—but she won't, she wouldn't for a hundred thousand pounds.

"Well, I prigged your handkerchief yesterday, my boy. No professional could have done it neater; and a queer thing it was that it should be your wife's, with her maiden name done in her own hair. Nothing could be luckier, and we had a rare laugh at it. Zinka was on the downs, not like a common Gipsy, but half a mile away towards Preston, in a beautiful tent of her own, for she never mixes with the common ruck. It takes an introduction, I can tell you, and a good one too, to get a word from her. But the Major managed

that, for he knows something of her people. There is no flummery about her. You cross her hand with a five pound note, and a crown-piece in it, and you tell her what you want, and whatever you give her to hold she keeps."

"You don't mean to say that a dirty Gipsy woman has got one of my Kitty's pocket-handkerchiefs?"

"Dirty Gipsy woman! She's as clean as any Queen; and for majesty and breed—oh, I wish you could have seen her. A thoroughbred filly three years old is more graceful than any woman that ever stepped. You can't expect two legs to go as well as four, you know. But Zinka—well, to see Sally walk after that! And Sally ain't clumsy in her paces neither. But what do you think she said? When we had told her all about it, she shut her great eyes for a minute, and her lashes came down to the brown roses on her cheeks, and then she whispered—

"'I can see a great ship coming over the sea, no smoke to it, only white white sails. And in the front of it I can see a beautiful young woman, looking towards England with tears in her eyes. The ship is sailing fast, but her heart is flying faster; and she never looks back,

and answers no one, only to ask how much longer it will be.'

"'And how much longer will it be?' we both asked her, because it was the very thing that you would want to know.

"'I cannot say, perhaps three, four weeks. The sun is very hot, and there is a black cloud before them. Perhaps it will swallow them up; I cannot tell. No there is a great bird with long white wings; it will take them through the cloud, and they will be safe. There, it is all sliding from me, like a mist! But I can see her eyes still, and they are full of tears and smiles.'

"Not another word could we get out of her, Kit. There were tears on her own cheeks, when she opened her eyes, and she did not know a single word she had been saying."

"I wish you had asked her where the ship was to land, and what was the name of it, and how she came there, and whether it would be any good for me to go to meet it, and who it was the lady was thinking of all the while, and how long the storm that was before them was to last, and whether the people on board——"

"Come, Kit, that is all the thanks we get. Major, do you hear him? No, the chap is fast

asleep. Between you and me, Kit, he has had a drop too much. But a man in a small way doesn't win five hundred, every day of his life, you know. By the way, I heard that Downy was hard hit again. But Pots took my tip, and has pocketed a thousand. Why, you never congratulated me, my boy. I shall throw up the book now, and invest it in my place. But we must be off, or Sally will blow up. Such a spread! You had better come. *Cinny* walks into the dining-room, and drinks a bottle of Champagne, and there will be some rattling good chaps there."

"There may be a thousand, Sam; but none better than yourself. I congratulate and thank you, Sam, with all my heart. Few fellows would have thought of a friend at such a time. But excuse me; I can't come to-night, indeed I can't. I want to think of this all by myself. You say that this beautiful Queen is never wrong. And what a heart she must have, what a fine heart, Sam! I should like to have seen the tears on her lovely cheeks."

"Oh, I say! Come, come, Kit. But she has never been known to be wrong, my dear fellow. All the tribe call her—well, I can't pronounce the name, but it means something like 'the

infallible divine.' And she does it all so simply! There is no humbug about her. Come along, Major; why, you must be starved."

I was partly ashamed of my own superstition; yet I could not help saying to myself—"They believe it; and they are ten times cleverer than I shall ever be."

CHAPTER XVIII.

HASTE TO THE WEDDING.

Things were not going very smoothly now with Mr. Donovan Bulwrag. Three of the four months allowed him by his father had passed already; yet no date was fixed, or seemed likely to be fixed, for the great event which was to make a wealthy man of him. The old man was urgent, and could not be brought to postpone his revenge to the convenience of his son, for he had learned already that this chip of the old block was of grain quite as crooked and cross-fibred as his own. His violent and vindictive heart was burning for the day when he should trample on the pride of the woman who had been his ruin, and had married again and lived in luxury, while putrid fish was his diet. Neither was revenge his only motive. Some provision must be made for him, something better than two pounds a week, and a wretched

den in London, as soon as ever he chose to apply to his aged father's men of business; and this he could not do (without upsetting all his plans) until he had revealed himself to that haughty woman.

"If you choose to make your own son a beggar, and to turn your daughters into the streets—you must. That is all I can say. I can do no more. I lost a lot of money to-day, all through you. I should never have invested sixpence, but for you. It does seem a little too hard upon a fellow, when he is doing all he knows to please a man who never helped him."

It was on the night of the Derby day, and father and son were holding their usual weekly interview in the Green Park. The older man was much better dressed and cleaner than he had been; but the other kept at a prudent distance, and took care to smoke throughout the time. He had looked into books, and found that the disorder is sometimes contagious, and sometimes not.

"Whose fault is it that I have never helped you?" the cripple asked disdainfully. "Don't walk so fast; my feet are not like yours. You make me even pay for my cab both ways. I came to please you. You shall pay for my cab.

And you shall pay for it a little further too. I demand to be established on the premises. You have plenty of room; and as you said once, it can be done without any one the wiser. How can I tell that she won't run away, the moment you are married? And I want to be where I can see my daughters. In a lonely rambling ramshackle house, like that, you could put me up easily. Why, I saw the very place, when I went round there after dark. Who ever goes near the Captain's workshops? Three of them, quite away from all the other rooms. I only want one, and I will have it. It would save me ten shillings a week, as well as cab-fare. They won't take me anywhere, in the vilest den, for less than that, when they see what I am. Christian country, isn't it? Why, the Pulcho Indians are better Christians than you are. Get that room ready by this day week."

"If I do, you must give me another month's grace. It will be a terrible risk to take. Every one watches us so about there; we have gained such a reputation."

"And I shall increase it, my son, as soon as known. Your mother never cared what was thought of her by any one. She will now have a fine case to defy the public with. I go into

that room, this day week. My goods are not as manifold as they were. I had twelve horses at my command at San Luis. Ah, we all have our ups and downs. I am on the up scale now."

Downy was very loth to receive his father so. He knew that it might be done safely enough, if the old man would only be cautious and discreet. But that was the very point he was sure to fail in. He would have been a great man by this time, perhaps a Dictator of three sprawling States, if his prudence had been equal to his strong will and valour. Some day his history may be written; and if it should be done with any skill, the reader will be likely to conclude that he has come across yet another instance of good material thrown away.

"I don't like it," said the dutiful son; "why can't you stay where you are, till it is over?" That is to say, his own wedding-day.

"Because I believe that you will make her bolt. At least, nobody can make her do anything, unless she chooses. But if she heard of me, she would bolt like a shot. And a nice fool I should be after that. It is no good arguing. In I go, this day week; or else I leave my card at the front door."

Donovan Bulwrag contended vainly. His father was as stubborn as himself, and a hundredfold as reckless. What had this afflicted mortal to be afraid of now? His sense of paternity must have been strong, and the staple of his nature something better than hardware, that he should have lain still so long in his misery, poverty, and ignominy, rather than assert himself, and shock the public, and destroy his son's last hope of high position.

Downy showed more than his usual craft, in this difficult crisis of his fortunes. He extorted from his father, before he let him in, a pledge that he would keep himself out of sight, and never move without his leave, for at least another month. The room in which he stored him was cold, and dark, and damp, and entirely out of view from all the people of the house; yet quite like a palace to the poor old man, after all the low dens he had been lurking in. He was smuggled in at night, and had to wait upon himself, receiving all his food from his son's hands alone. The window had been fitted with dark wooden blinds, for some of the Professor's experiments, and the obscurity was deepened by the great ilex tree.

The Earl of Clerinhouse, though one of the

wealthiest men of the day, lived a very quiet life. His health was not strong, and he hated all display, and had no turn for sporting, or gambling, or politics, or any other form of noise and push. He cared not for books, or art, or agriculture, or women, or the drama, or the pleasures of the table. He was satisfied to take the world as he found it, and to keep himself out of it, whenever he could. Not for the sake of saving money, for no one could charge him with avarice; and when he saw good to be done, he did it in the most generous and even lavish style. The few who knew him intimately loved him deeply for his gentleness, simplicity, and good will; and often it was said of him, and not untruly, that he had never spoken harshly to any human being.

His father had been a great City man, keen, energetic, and enterprising; but though the present Earl retained his interest in great houses founded by his father, he never concerned himself about the money-market, and entered into no speculations. The one ray of romance in his quiet life had fallen across it when he was quite young. When the Bright Suns of Sunbury were in their zenith, he had been dazzled and smitten for a while by

the lustre of Miss Monica. Happily for him, his suit was vain; he had too little "go" in him to suit her taste; and he married a lady better fitted for him, who left him a widower with one daughter. But the arrogant beauty retained and asserted—when it became of importance to her—a certain strange influence upon his tranquil mind.

He had never liked Donovan Bulwrag, and shrank from entrusting his treasure to him. For his daughter Clara was the treasure of his life, the only object for which he cared to preserve his feeble vitality. Lady Clara, now in her twentieth year, resembled her father almost too closely. She was gentle, simple, and unpretending, apt to think the best of everybody, and to yield to a will more robust than her own. She was likely to make a most admirable wife for a strong and good man, who would cherish her; but with a coarse unfeeling husband, she was certain to pine away and die; for her mind was very sensitive, and her constitution weak.

Seeing little of the world, and knowing less about it, this graceful and elegant girl had been induced, partly by the mother's heroic commendations, to fix her affections upon Downy Bulwrag.

How any girl could like that fellow it is hard to say; there was something so disgusting in his countenance to me, and his slow, deliberate, sarcastic speech, as if he thought over every word he uttered, and passed it through his mind to make it nasty. However, she considered him a hero; and so he was—a hero of cold cunning and hot wickedness.

"You have at him, and I will have at her," said this hero to his mother, as they drove to Berkeley Square; "it can't go on like this. Why, I scarcely dare go out. Why, the fellows at the *Fan-tail* were talking all about me, when I dropped in for an hour last night. I knew it by the way they began about the weather, and that ass of a Grogan whispered —'Hush! here he is.' I shall tell her I am off to Nova Zembla next week; and you lay it on thick about what Dr. Medley said. Work the old muff upon that tack, and about the feeble heart-action, and the nervous system, and all that stuff. But let me have the little doll all to myself."

Mrs. Fairthorn sighed, for she had quick perception, and some good behind all her badness. "I fear that the little doll is too good for you," she answered; and he smiled at her.

How they managed it, matters little; but they thought they had managed it rarely well. No doubt they told lies pat as puddings, and plentiful as blackberries. The Lord, who settles all things well—as we sometimes find out in the end—allowed them this little bit of triumph, to increase their discomfiture. But after all, I have no ill will, and am sorry that they had so much.

"How beautifully everything has gone off, Don!" said the lady, when she had settled her stately form in the watered silk again; "you see what a little tact can do. I put it as a favour to that poor thing. The objections have come from those wretched lawyers. The poor Earl would not hear a word about the money. I can't think what I have been about, not to take the bull by the horns long ago. But the fault was yours. I could never trust you. Well, I was never more pleased in my life. It will be in the *Morning Post* to-morrow. Did you see how the poor Earl looked at me? I can wind him round my finger."

"The Professor may go to the bottom with his trawl; and then who knows what might happen?" Donovan spoke with a bitter smile; he had never entirely forgiven his mother for her second marriage.

"Don't be so shocking, Don. I am ashamed of you. Well, a month is not very long to wait; and there is a great deal to see to. Frizzy and Jerry will be bridesmaids of course, and I must not be quite a dowdy. How that pest of a Dulcamara will ko-tow! She threatened me with the Queen's Bench yesterday. I am not sure that I shall give her any order. I should like to break her heart, and I know how to do it. If I put the whole into Madame Fripré's hands, Dulcamara would never look up again. But her cut is so inferior to Dulcamara's. Well, I need not make my mind up, until to-morrow."

"I think you had better keep the whole thing quiet, and pull it off without any fuss at all. The Earl hates pomps and vanities, so does Clara, and so do I. We had better have no humbug."

"And be married at a Registry-office, I suppose. None of that mean shabby work for me. Everything shall be left in my hands, and I'll see that things are done properly. If it was only to vex your Aunt Arabella, after her trumpery rudeness to you, I should insist upon decency and comfort. I know how to cut her to the heart, and I intend to do it. The very

day before the wedding, I shall write—'Dearest Arabella,—We have been disappointed at the last moment by the dear Duchess of Coventry. Her Grace is afflicted with a bilious attack. Would you mind taking her place to-morrow, and excuse the brevity of this invitation?' I should like to see her passionate face, when she gets that."

"Don't be a fool, mother. You know, after all, you and I are the proper heirs to her estates, though she can dispose of them as she likes. She dislikes us; but she is an upright woman. It would be mad to offend her fatally."

"She has cheated me out of house and land. There is no primogeniture among women. I simply did the thing she was going to do. She has rolled in money, and let me roll in the dirt. None of her posthumous benevolence for me! You will never see me grovelling at that woman's feet."

At the rehearsal of her wrongs, her violent temper rose and swelled, as a dog's wrath waxes with his own bark. She stood up in the carriage, and crushed her head-dress. This doubled her fury, and she turned upon her son.

"And you—I should like to know what you

are doing in my house—my house, if you please, not yours. You think I know nothing about it, do you? No more of it! From this very hour, you drop your disgraceful bachelor ways, or I fetch the police and rout out those rooms. Now, remember what I say. When I say a thing, I do it."

"You are altogether wrong. There is nothing of the sort;" Downy answered in a stern voice that cowed her; "to the last day of your life, you will repent it, if you dare to go meddling there."

"*Dare* is not a word to use to me," she answered in a sullen tone, and closed her lips. If she feared any one in the world, she feared her own son Donovan. The difference between her will and his was as that between a torrent and the sea. Hers was force, and his was power. Sometimes she was sorry for her haste and fury; but in him there was no repentance.

He left her to herself, and said no more. In one thing they were much alike. Neither of them had great faith in words, whether used to them, or by them. Having little faith in what they heard, they expected little for what they said. It was no affront to either of them, but an act of justice, to doubt every word of their

mouths, because their mouths were wells of leasing.

"You will have to clear out, poor old chap;" said Downy that night to his father, whom he now regarded with rough affection, as well as fitful pity. "All settled now, about you know what. In three weeks or so, I shall have to slope. Who would bring you your grub, but your dutiful son? What is it about the ravens? And worse than that—she has smoked you already. In spite of all pledges, you have been out at night."

"Who could stay mewed up, night and day? Let her smoke what she likes; I have got a pipeful for her."

"Yes, and for me, and yourself too. Bedlam, or Hospital, or Workhouse for us all, if she finds you here, before the job is done. After that, have it out, when you like. No dutiful son interferes between his parents. If this is broken off, there will be no shilling left, for you to have sixpence out of."

It may fairly be hoped that he had some other plan, though as yet he durst not mention it, for saving them both from the awful meeting of which he spoke so lightly.

"How am I to know that it is settled even

now? You have put me off so many times. I might as well be on the *Simon Pure* again."

"I will show it you to-morrow in the paper, announced for an early day—and it needs be an early one."

"Sorry to doubt you. Not at all a truthful family. Three weeks more, my son; and that's every hour. Let her come spying, if she likes. She never could keep her nose out of anything, or perhaps I shouldn't be quite as I am. I am sorry for my lady; I only hope the pleasure will be mutual."

CHAPTER XIX.

THERE SAT KITTY.

While these things thus were growing near me, as I learned soon afterwards, in our place there was no sign yet of anything encouraging. My Uncle Corny, who had always vowed that he never would bet a farthing, was now in a highly grumbling state, because he had not backed *Nutmeg-grater*.

"A horse bred and born in our own fields—a colt I have seen through the hedge fifty times, without caring to count his legs almost, and he goes and wins five thousand pounds, and how much do I get? Not a penny. I think it was very unkind of Sam; unnatural, and not neighbourly, to let Ludred get all the good of that, and not a threepenny bit come to Sunbury!"

"Now, Uncle Corny, you talk of justice, and every one calls you a superior man;" I said, with the desire to mollify him, but the method

misdirected; "how many times have I heard Sam Henderson tell you to put a bit of money on that horse? But you said—'None of your gambling for me!' And now, because the horse has won, you think you have been ill-treated!"

"Kit, you stick to your own affairs. What do you know about things like this? I want none of their dirty money. I pay my way, by honest work. They are a set of rogues, all together. You never see anything clearly now. Your wits are always gone wool-gathering. Why, your own Aunt Parslow won a box of gloves. And you are satisfied with my getting nothing."

It was true that my wits were wool-gathering now, but they travelled a long way for nothing. Ever since Sam, and Major Monkhouse, brought me the story of that strange vision, it seemed to be dwelling in my brain, and driving every solid sense out of it. All day long, and all night too, the same thing was before me—a ship with white sails piled on one another, like a tower of marble arches, the blue water breaking into silver at her steps, and upon the forefront a figure standing, with arms extended, and bright eyes yearning, and red lips opened to say—"here I am!"

I went to the post, three times a day, for we

now had three deliveries, and who could wait for old Bob's slow round? And often in the middle of a mutton-chop, which Tabby would grind into my listless mouth, at a shadow on the window, or the creaking of a door, I was up, and had my hat on, and was listening in the lane.

Any one would laugh at the foolish things I did. I kept the kettle boiling, day and night, until there was a hole in it, and I had to buy another; I dusted all the chairs three times a day; I kept a bunch of roses on the window-sill, and cut a fresh Tea-rose, every morn and evening, to go into Kitty's bosom, when she should appear. I ordered a cold chicken every day from Mr. Rasp, and garnished it with parsley, and handed it over with a sigh to Mrs. Tompkins, when nobody came to taste it; and I made Polly Tompkins sleep with a string round her arm, and the end hanging out of the window. Every man on the place swore that I was cracked, except Selsey Bill, who stuck a spade up at my door.

"Afore the rust cometh down the blade of that there tool, you'll be a happy man, Master Kit," he said; and as he spoke his little squinny eyes were bright with something that removes the rust of human nature's metal.

At last, I was truly getting genuinely cracked. Another week of burning hope and weltering dejection, of tossing to the sky and tumbling to the depths of darkness, must have left my dull brain empty of the little gift God put in it.

When a whole month had expired from the day when hope awoke, reason fell upon me like a flail, and hope was chaff. I made my usual preparations, with a bitter grin at them, and set the roses in the window, with contempt of their loveliness.

"The last time of all this tomfoolery," I said; "to-morrow I shall work hard again. Everything is lies, and tricks, and rot. Kitty has taken up with some fellow, and they are laughing at me in some gambling-den. I have a great mind to smash it up altogether. I shall sleep where that *Regulus* slept to-night. Much good I did by stealing him. Hard work is the only thing worth doing."

It was the first time that I had ever dared to think such a shameful thing of my pure wife; and I hope that I did not think it now, but said it by the Devil's prompting. If any one had said it in my hearing, he would have said little else for another month. And I could have

knocked my own self on the head, with great pleasure, when I came to think of it.

We laugh very nicely—when they cannot hear us—at women, for not knowing their own minds; but no woman ever born, since they began to bear us, could have gainsayed herself, as a man did, that day. I wandered about and lay under trees, for now it was the 15th of June, and the weather warm and sunny; then I climbed up trees and watched the river, and the roads, and even the meadow-path, where the cows were, and the mushrooms grew. Then I went and had a talk with Widow Cutthumb, and when she began to run down the race of women, I went so much further, that she grew quite sharp, and extolled them, and put all the blame upon us. It was waste of time to reason with her; so I let her have her own way, as they always do.

Then I went to the butcher's, and saw a fine sweet-bread, the very thing for any one just come from a long journey, and perhaps a little giddy from the rolling of a ship. With a sigh of despair I pulled out half a crown, and made him lend me a basket and a clean white napkin. Then I could not run home with it quick enough, for it seemed as if some one would be dying

without it; but as soon as I got to our door, I set it down, and could not bring myself even to enter the house. Away I went, and got into the loneliest place I could find; and being rather light of head from grief and want of food, fell over an old apple-trunk, and fell asleep beside it.

When I awoke, the sun was set; and the men (who were now working overtime, to be ready for the strawberries) were all gone home with their frails upon their backs, and their little ones coming down the road to meet them. Dizzily I pushed my way into a grassy alley, and sauntered homeward, wishing only to go home for ever.

The front-door was open, which did not surprise me, for I often left it so, and the basket containing the sweet-bread was gone, and the roses were moved from the window. The sound of my boots did not ring as it used, and the air seemed less empty, and softer. In a stupefied hurry, I opened the door of the parlour—and there sat Kitty!

Kitty looking at me, with a strange and timid look. As if she were not certain that I would be glad to see her. As if she doubted whether I could love her any more; as if her soul in earth and heaven hung on the next moment.

I could not go to her, and I could not say a word; and to tell the truth, I don't know what I did. But I must have spread my arms, by some gift of nature; for before I could think of it, there she was; weeping—as I never could have thought it possible for any one, even in this world of tears, to weep.

Then she put up her hand, with the fingers thrown back, and stroked my cheeks gently, and said—"How thin! How thin!" Then she threw both arms around my neck, and drew my face down to her lips, and covered every inch of it with sobbing kisses. I pressed her sweet bosom to mine, and our hearts seemed to beat into one another.

"Oh, Kit, my own, own dear old Kit! Can you ever forgive me? Ever?"

She said this, I dare say fifty times, scarcely allowing me to speak, for she said it was not good for me; withdrawing, and feigning to be ashamed of her passionate love, every now and then; and then rushing into my embrace again. Then she stood up, and threw back her beautiful hair, and said with the glance which she knew I adored—

"Well, how do you think I am looking, love? Don't you think it is high time to tell me?"

She was wearing some foreign dress, beautifully cut, which set off her figure; and she knew it very well.

"I never saw you looking half so lovely," I replied; "though I thought it impossible to improve you."

"Sun-burnt, and freckled, and mosquito-bitten. But never mind, dear, if you love your own wife. We'll soon make all that right again. Oh, I have been too wild! Feel how my heart is jumping."

She was threatened with hysterics; but I soothed her gently, and she rested on my breast with her eyes half closed. As I looked at her, I felt that in this rapture I could die.

"Darling, I can hardly believe it yet;" she whispered, playing with my fingers to make sure; "see, this is my wedding-ring, I never took it off. What fine gold it is, not to tarnish with my tears. The drops that have fallen on it—oh, I wonder there is any blue left in my eyes at all! Do you think they are as blue, dear, as when you used to love them?"

"They are bluer, heart of hearts. They are larger and deeper. The tears of true love have made them still more lovely."

"But yours are so worn, and sad, and

harassed! That can't be from loving me more than I love you; because that is simply impossible. But you never have been—tell me, tell me all the truth. Was there any truth whatever in that horrible tale? Remember I shall love you just the same. If you tore me to pieces, I should love you."

"What horrible tale? I have never heard of any horrible tale, except your going away."

"And you don't know the reason! Oh Kit, oh Kit, have you taken me back like this, without even knowing why I went?"

"Darling, I have not the least idea why you went. I was too glad to get you back, to think of anything else."

"Well, you are a true love! You are a husband such as no woman on the earth deserves. I don't think even I could have taken you back so, if you had run away from me, and I knew nothing of the cause."

"Oh yes, you would, Kitty; I am sure you would. I believe in you, just as you would in me, and talking has nothing to do with it. But how did you expect me to know all about it?"

"Why, of course, by the letter I sent you from Ascension. The moment we got your letter—the moment I could stop crying, crying,

crying—I wrote you such a letter, darling. Oh, I thought it would have killed me with wonder, and with joy. It was almost as sweet as this—not quite, not quite; nothing else can ever be quite so sweet as this."

"Then were you with your father? Were you with him all the time?"

"To be sure I was, dearest. Do you think I would have gone with any one else, away from you—away from my own husband?"

"But I thought it quite impossible for you to be with him. He was far in the Atlantic, dear, before you ran away."

"Before I ran away! Oh Kit, oh Kit! And you thought I had run away with somebody else! Oh, what has my misery been, compared with yours? No wonder you are thin, dear; no wonder you are gaunt. Why, I can't think how you can have managed to keep alive. I am sure I should have been dead, buried, and forgotten. Thirteen months, a year and a month, to be thinking your own new-married wife had run away, like a bad woman! Oh dear! Don't stop me; I must cry again, or I may do something worse. And you have not even got my letter yet?"

"No. But I dare say it will come by and

by. I expected no letter from you, of course, because I had no idea where you were; but every day I hoped for one from your father. But they told me the mails from Ascension are uncertain, because they take their chance of passing ships. Sometimes they don't come for months together."

"Now will you read this?" she cried, jumping up with her old impetuosity; "I am very glad I kept it, though it makes me creep every time I touch it. That explains everything. Who wrote that?"

"It is like my writing; but I never wrote a word of it, and never saw, or dreamed of it before."

"Whoever wrote that letter, Kit," my wife said very solemnly, "ought to have his portion for ever and ever in the bottomless pit, where the fire is not quenched. I could never have believed that any human being could possibly have conceived such wickedness. But don't read it now; it would take too long, and spoil our perfect happiness, darling. We must not be so selfish. No more kisses, until we have done our duty. Just put me into trim again, and let me do my hair up, and we must both run down to Uncle Corny's. Nobody has seen

me yet, but you. What do you think I did? I was quite resolved that no one should see me, but my own husband. So I left my things at Feltham, and ran all the way—flew all the way, I ought to say, and came through Love Lane all alone. Oh, we will never part again, not even for a day, Kit, or half a day. You must never let me out of your sight, any more."

"And not out of my arms, when I can help it," I said, as with my dear wife still enclasped, and her hair waving over my bounding heart, I took her through the quiet alleys of the summer night, just to show her for a minute—for I could not spare her more—to the loyal and good Uncle Corny.

CHAPTER XX.

A MENSÂ ET TORO.

It is out of my power to say, because I have never studied human nature—having more than I can properly get through with trees and animals—but according to the little I have seen, the spirit of revenge is stronger in women, than it usually is in us. Whatever wrong a man may have done me, if he only says that he is sorry for it, or if without that I have got the better of him, I am quite content that he should go, and settle the question as between him and the Lord. I wish him no ill, but what he may do himself; and even if I hear of his getting his deserts, I feel no elation, but endeavour to be sorry.

But my Uncle Corny, who understands the fair sex—at least according to his own account—declares that they not only cannot forgive a deadly wrong done to them, but continue to

think that the world is a bad place and sadly neglected by Providence, until they see the people, who have made them unhappy, paying out for it, as they ought to do.

My Kitty was the very best of all her sex—which is saying a great deal more than some men may imagine, and means much more than if it were said of them—but still I could see that she was not contented even with our new honeymoon (which was ten times sweeter than the first one, though that had been most delicious), from a lofty desire for perfect justice; which a man is quite satisfied to do without, knowing (as he does) that otherwise he never could have satisfaction at all.

And yet I could see that she trembled, whenever she had hinted at that little drawback, for fear of the danger that it might involve to me; for she never seemed to think that I could take care of myself, as well as she took care of me.

It is not for me to say, how these things are, or rather how they ought to be; and I am free to acknowledge that if Downy Bulwrag had come down meddling with my wife again, I should have killed him; and risked the chance of being hanged for a fellow unworthy of it. And when I read aloud that wicked letter, in

the presence of Kitty and my Uncle, the next day, there were times when I longed to have him by the throat, and prevent more lies coming out of it. For the Devil himself must have stood at his elbow, and gone into his brain as well, while he was about it. And he had made the ground ready for his lies to grow, by a black mysterious note beforehand, signed—"A well-wisher in Sunbury." This we had not in our possession yet; but Kitty knew the effect of it upon her father's mind.

As I read the vile forgery, bearing my name, Uncle Corny fell back in his chair, and shut his lips. Then he closed his fist also, and from time to time he kept stamping with his boots, as if his feet were tingling. But Kitty put her tender hand into mine, and her breath was short, and her bosom heaved, and her eyes flashed like the summer-lightning, or sometimes filled with heavy drops.

"My dear and respected Father-in-law,

"I have a sad confession to make to you, which I ought to have made long ago, but I knew that I must have lost your daughter by it. I will not pretend to excuse my conduct, for I know that I have behaved shamefully.

But I could not foresee the frightful danger to which she is now exposed daily. My heart is almost broken, for I love her wildly, savagely, and in plain truth madly.

"Last autumn I committed a very base act, and I am justly punished for it. To keep your sweet Kitty here a little longer, and give me more chances of seeing her, I was mean enough to steal Miss Coldpepper's favourite dog, a mongrel called *Regulus*. I hid him in my Uncle's garden, while the country was being searched for him; and thus, as perhaps you remember, I obtained the honour of your acquaintance. But I was punished for that sneaking trick. The cur bit me thrice in the legs and thigh, and I am doomed to a horrible death, I fear; for the dog has gone mad, and the disease was in him then.

"I have been, without any one's knowledge, to the first authority in London on such matters, and he says that I ought to be watched, and must hold aloof from all family ties for a while. He asked if I was married, and then he told me the most horrible story I ever heard; and he conjured me, unless I wished to kill my wife, to separate from her for at least two years. When I would not promise that, he

was anxious to write to her relatives himself; but I gave him a false address, and nothing came of that.

"I hoped that he might be mistaken, but now I feel that he was only too correct. Your Kitty is not safe with me, another day. I have the most awful sensations sometimes. The malady has got hold of me too surely, though nobody yet suspects it. I have felt a wild desire to tear her to pieces; and the only atonement I can make for my offence is to beg you to take her immediately. You are likely to be away for about two years; and when you return, if I am still alive, which is most unlikely, I may safely reclaim her.

"I implore you not to let her know the cause of this sad parting. It would keep her in awful suspense and misery, and perhaps be as fatal to her, as I myself should be. She is so good and dutiful, and trusts me so entirely, that if you say it is my wish, for reasons you approve of—however she may grieve about it, she will not rebel. Come for her, or send for her, without my knowledge, without the knowledge of any one near our place; for if the story got abroad, I should go mad at once. My only hope lies in perfect quiet; therefore she must not write

to me, and I must not hear a word, even from yourself, about her. She must not stop to pack up clothes, or anything whatever; for if I came in, I should destroy her, if I saw it. But order particularly that she shall take every farthing in the house she knows of, to equip her for her long voyage in a seaport town. The money is her own; and she must take it.

"I send this by hand, as I know not where you are; but the bearer knows how to find you. There is no answer, except to do what I implore most pitifully, if you wish to save your only child from a fearful death, at the hands of the one who loves her now *so madly*. I pray God that you may be yet in time. I feel a little calmer after writing this. This morning I was in agony at the sight of water. May the Lord have you, and my darling in his keeping. Oh, how base I have been, but I have done no murder yet!

"Your heart-broken son-in-law,

"C. ORCHARDSON."

When I had finished, my Uncle spoke; for Kitty could only press my hand, and sometimes look at me, and sometimes turn her eyes away and blush.

"These are the things," my Uncle said, "that make one ashamed of being called a man. No snake could do such a thing, and no dog would, however mankind might train him. And the bit of piety towards the end! The father was a blackguard, the mother a Fury, the son is the Devil with all his angels. Oh Kit, Kit, I am old, and have met with a great deal of wickedness, but none like this."

"But you know, Uncle Corny, you must not be disturbed," said Kitty going up to him, and kissing his forehead, in her sweet and graceful way, "just because there happen to be bad people in the world. It has always been so, and I fear it always must. And you must not imagine that Kit meant any harm, by—by just borrowing Auntie Coldpepper's dog. He did it—oh, so cleverly—just for the sake of seeing me; and he quite changed the character of that dog. But how can that bad man have found it out?"

"Through Harker," I exclaimed, "through that wretch of a Harker, who was always spying on these premises. Sam Henderson knew it, most likely through him; but Sam would never have spoken of it."

"It is true then," said my Uncle. "Well, I

thought it was a lie. I am surprised to find that I have a dogstealer for my nephew."

"It was Tabby made him do it. And I am very glad she did. But the first thing Dr. Cutler said to me, when my heart was nearly broken with his message, was—'Did your husband steal that dog?' And of course I said 'Yes;' for Kit had told me all about it, when we were at Baycliff; and no doubt that convinced the good doctor that all the rest of that sad wicked letter was true. You know, Uncle Corny, that it was impossible for my father to leave the ship, and he sent his old friend Dr. Cutler to fetch me. Oh, how I did cry all the way! I thought there never would be any more happiness for me. And of course they never told me why I was to go. I thought that Kit must be tired of me; and yet I could not quite believe that, you know. Oh, Kit, I shall never be tired of you."

"Don't cry, my darling," said my Uncle kindly. "We have had enough tears to drown that devilish letter. Now sit on Kit's lap, to make sure of him, and tell me your own adventures, for I have only guessed them yet."

"Oh, I had no adventures, and I never noticed anything, only to ask how far we were

from England, and to count the days till we should have finished all the work. I made a little calendar, as the girls do at school, the girls I mean who have real mothers, and I blotted out every day when it was over, and thought—'one less now before I see Kit again.' Of course I asked my father what had made him send for me, and he said it was my husband's most earnest entreaty, and if I loved him I must ask no more, but keep up my spirits and obey his orders. Father never showed me this letter, or I think—though I can't be quite sure—that I should have doubted about it. The writing is exactly like Kit's in some places, but in others it is different, and the style is not like Kit's. That wicked man stole several letters of Kit's; I suspected it then, and now I know it.

"My father had not the smallest doubt, of course, but he was puzzled when I spoke about that telegram, you know what I mean—the one from Captain Jenkins at Falmouth, to say the ship was on her voyage, and to send good-bye to us. He had sent no such message, and had spoken no such ship, and said that it must be some extraordinary mistake. But you see now it was another piece of falsehood, to make it look impossible that I could be with my father.

"It was father himself who went to Baycliff to enquire, knowing that we had been there, and being near it. But he could not come here, and so he sent Dr. Cutler, who knows all this neighbourhood well, and managed it all to perfection with the help of some one, who was sent by agreement to meet him. Oh dear, when I think of that dreadful time; and I was not allowed to leave a line for my husband, except what I wrote, on the sly, in the Prayer-book. Well that did him some good, at any rate; didn't it, my own darling?

"I am quite ashamed to talk of my own sorrow, when I think of what Kit has been through for me. But I am sure I ate nothing for at least a month, and Dr. Cutler, who was in charge of the health of the ship's company, became quite uneasy about me. As for their experiments, deep-sea dredging, and soundings, and temperatures, and all that, I did not even care to look at them, and I am not a bit more scientific than when I went out, though perhaps I shall talk as if I was, by and by. The only thing I felt any interest in was the rescue of a poor afflicted man—I think they called him a Spaniard, though he seemed to me more like an Englishman—who was kept as a prisoner

among some savages in a desert place in South America. He was terribly afflicted with some horrible disease; and the sailors would not go near him, until they were ashamed when they saw me do it. We were all very kind to him, but he left us, and got on board another ship bound for home.

"Oh, how I used to tremble, Kit, whenever we saw a ship in the distance, hoping for news of you, my dear, and of Uncle Corny, and everybody. But we met very few ships, being generally employed in out-of-the-way places, and only landing anywhere two or three times, for water, or fruit, or vegetables.

"But when we got to Ascension Island, which is an English place, you know, what a joyful surprise there was for me! I shall always bless that little rocky spot, for it gave me back my life again. When father received my husband's letter, for the first time in his life, he was in a real fury. Something or other had occurred before, besides that affair of the telegram, which made him a little doubtful about this wicked, wicked letter. And now he saw at once that he had been imposed upon most horribly. We were all afraid that he would have had a fit, but Dr. Cutler saved him.

"My poor injured child!" he kept on exclaiming; "wretched for at least a year, and injured for life, by this monstrous villany!" He would have thrown up his command at once, if he could have done it honourably, and brought me home by the very next ship. But if he had done so, the cruise must have ended; for Lieutenant Morris, who was next to him, was invalided at Fort George. I was quite ready to come home alone, by any ship, English or foreign; but as it happened, Dr. Cutler received by the same mail an urgent request from his wife for his return; and so the very gentleman I ran away with brought me back to my husband. It was a long time before we could get a ship, and then it was only a sailing vessel, and oh how slowly she seemed to go! Then about a month ago, we had a very heavy storm, which drove us I don't know how far out of our course, and I thought that I never should see Kit again. But now it seems all like a horrible dream. Father will be home, in November I hope. I intend to work hard to help Uncle Corny; and Kit will soon be well again, with me to mind him."

CHAPTER XXI.

HER OWN WAY.

"You must not let it drop, Kit; you can't let it drop," said Aunt Parslow, as she sat in our parlour, the next day, having ordered Parker's fly, as soon as she received my letter; "for the sake of your sweet wife, you are absolutely bound to expose this horrid miscreant. I doubt if there ever was such a case before, though nothing ever surprises me. It was very nasty of you to steal that dog—why, you might have come and stolen *Jupiter*, on the very same principle of a pretty girl—and you have been punished, even more than you deserved. You deserved a month in the stocks perhaps, with all the dogs in the village sniffing at you; but you did not deserve to lose your own wife, just when you had time to get fond of her. I am not for revenge; I am too old to fancy that we can do much to right ourselves, even if the

feeling was Christian; but I belong to an honourable family, in which the fair fame of a lady was never neglected."

"I declare I never thought once of that; it never occurred to me in that light," I answered with perfect truth; for my Kitty's fair fame seemed to me so entirely above all question, that it could not need any assertion; "but since it is capable of being looked at so, there is no doubt what my duty is."

"No husband of proper spirit could doubt for a moment what his duty is." Miss Parslow spoke very severely; but my wife looked at her reproachfully, and ran up to me.

"No, Kit, no. You shall not go near him. There is nothing too bad for him to do. I have lost you quite long enough already. What do I care what anybody says? Miss Parslow, you have been wonderfully kind, and it is impossible to thank you. Don't spoil it all, by putting this into his head."

"My dear, we shall send the two policemen with him," my Aunt replied rather sarcastically; "we know how precious he is, and we won't have him hurt. Or perhaps your Uncle Cornelius might go. He has no wife, to make a to-do about him. Look, here he comes with

somebody, to tell us something! He walks like a man of thirty-five, and how polite he always is!"

Uncle Corny had brought Mrs. Wilcox from his house, and that good lady was in great excitement. She fell upon Kitty, and kissed and hugged her, until I thought really there had been enough of that; and then she turned round, and addressed us at large, casting forth her words with vehemence, and throwing out her hands, as if to catch them.

"Ladies, and Gents, oh ladies and gents, such a thing have just come to my knowledge through Ted, which is the most intellectuous boy, though my own child, and was never such myself. I set off straightway, when I heard it, and beg to excoose of my present disapparel, to catch the three ten 'bus, or else wait another hour. And if there is a good horse on the place, which by the look of it there must be many, I do beg of Master Kit to put him in at once, if not too late to prevent bloody murder. Them police is so slow, so slow; though I never join in a single word against them, for all morshal men is fallible."

"I can't make out what it is," said Uncle Corny, when we all looked at him, for an ex-

planation; "this good lady must be allowed her own time; I am afraid that I have hurried her."

"Not at all, Mr. Orchardson, not at all. Nothing could be more gentlemanly, and I will say the same of all Sunbury. But the wedding was to be to-morrow, gents, regardless of expense, at eleven o'clock, at the church of Saint Nicholas, the Virgin. It was not for me to forbid the banns, though knowing of holy impediments. Very handsome it was to be with six bridesmaids, Miss Frizzy and Miss Jerry for two of them. Cook, who is a very self-respected young woman, though Ted says she have turned forty-two, and no concern of his if she is even two and forty, she dropped in promiscuous and told me all about it, and all was as merry as a marriage-bell. But just as I was having my bit of dinner, in she comes with her cap-ribbons flying off, and her apron-strings burst, being rather stout with running.

"'For God's sake, come up, Mrs. Wilcox,' she says, 'or there'll be murder done, murder done, and nobody to see it.'

"I was there in two minutes, as you may suppose; and there was Madam, tearing up and down the front walk, with her black silk-

cloak on that makes her look so tall, and her face—oh, you should have seen the colour of it, and the flashing of her eyes, and the waving of her arms. 'I insist upon knowing. I insist upon going in. Am I going to be locked out of my own house? To-morrow, indeed! Don't talk to me of to-morrow. How dare you prevent me from entering my own door? I'll find out your disgraceful tricks, and expose you. You are not fit to marry a respectable girl. I'll send for a policeman, and have the door forced.'

"'You won't do anything of the kind,' her son Mr. Downy made answer quietly, although I could see that he was awful pale, and he sat on a kitchen chair in front of the door, with his broad shoulders set against it. 'I tell you it is for your sake that I will not allow it. You may walk about all night, but you won't walk in here.'

"Ladies, and gents, she kept pacing up and down, like a Beelzebub more than a mortal woman, raving and ranting to such a degree, that a crowd of people came and looked over the gate, and they began to cry, 'Bravo, Rous!' 'Go it, old lady!' 'Hit him hard, he ain't got no friends'—and all that stuff; you know how

free and easy a London crowd is. Then she marched up to the gate, and looked at them, and they fell away ashamed, and she walked into the house. But have her way she will, before the sun goes down. She has sworn it, and she never breaks her oath."

"It is no concern of ours," said my Uncle very sensibly; "what have we to do with such family quarrels? What made you come to us, Mrs. Wilcox?"

"Two things, sir; in the first place, you know more of the law than any gentleman I know. You remember how you told me that last winter, and every word you said came true as gospel. And what is more than that, poor Miss Jerry, and Miss Frizzy backed her up in that same, she says to me—'Oh, Mrs. Wilcox, do try to get that nice young man from Sunbury, that married poor Kitty Fairthorn. He has more power over mother than any one on earth. She is afraid of him, that's the truth, though she'd box my ears if she heard me say so. There might be time enough,' she says, 'if you'd set off directly, and I'll pay all expenses.' Well, I thought it must come from Heaven, that I should be thinking of the Uncle, and she of the nephew; and so come, both gents, I beg

of you; there'll be murder between them, if you don't; for the police can't interfere, you know."

"Kit, let us go," said my Uncle Corny, as some new idea struck him; "we cannot interfere of course, but we can see the end of it."

Kitty was very much against my going, and I would not have left her, unless Miss Parslow had promised to stay with her, until our return, although it would compel her to send back the fly, and beg a bed for the night from her old friend Sally.

My Uncle took a big stick, and so did I; and in a quarter of an hour we started in the tax-cart, with Mrs. Wilcox on the cushion. I was the driver, and my Uncle sat behind, for there was no room for three of us, all rather broad, in front. And certainly I was the calmest of the three, for the good lady was in a dreadful fright and fret; and my Uncle sat heavily, with his chin upon his stick, taking no notice of the roads or streets, but dwelling on the distance of bygone sorrow. The wrong he had suffered was greater than mine in one way, and less in another; greater, because it was incurable; lighter, because less cold-blooded and crafty, and not inflicted on him through his

own wife. But I, with my Kitty recovered, and still in the new delight of that recovery, had triumphed already in the more important part, and was occupied rather with contempt than hatred. And it seemed to me too an extraordinary thing, and the last I should ever have predicted, that I should be entreated by the daughters of that most haughty and headstrong woman, to come and exert for her own good my imaginary power over her.

We put up our cart at the *Bricklayer's Arms*, where Ted had been pot-boy—or potman he called himself—and then we all hurried towards Bulwrag Park. The midsummer sun had just gone down; and as the red light glanced along the broad stately roads, I thought of the words of that violent lady—"before the sun goes down, I will have my way."

We passed between some posts into the open space, coveted vainly by builders, where the old Scotch firs (which had been my Kitty's landmark) still waved their black pillows against the western sky. Then a number of people came rushing by us, driven by that electric impulse, which flashes through the human heart that human life is passing. With the contagion of haste we began to run.

"Can't come in. Nobody allowed past this rope."

A posse of policemen had drawn a cord across the road, outside the old gate, because that was a very poor obstacle; and now I dare say there were a hundred people pushing; and in five minutes there would be a thousand.

I said, "I am Professor Fairthorn's son-in-law, and the two young ladies have sent for me. And Mrs. Wilcox is an old servant of the family, who was sent in haste to fetch me."

They dropped the rope at this, and let us in; being reasonable, as the police are generally, unless you rub their coats up the wrong way of the cloth.

But what a sight we had, when once we turned the corner! Having never been brought up in battle-fields, but only where apples and pears grow, I found myself all abroad, and felt my legs desirous to go away from one another. But my Uncle laid hold of me, and said—"This is what it comes to. The man, who has been a man, may look on at the Devil."

Mrs. Wilcox turned back; for her nerves were rheumatic; but they would not let her pass the rope again. I was looking round, and

saw it, with a desire to do the same; but my Uncle had me by the collar, and I knew that he was right, though I would rather not have known it.

"Stop, and see the works of God," he said. And I answered—"No, I would rather not, if this is a sample of them."

For before the front door there were things going on, which made it impossible to let that house after it came into our possession, even to a most enlightened widow from America—or at any rate she took it, and then threw it up again. There were as good as three corpses laid out upon the lawn, with a doctor attending upon each, and two policemen; and one of them also had a magistrate.

Uncle Corny drew me forward, as I shrank behind the bay-tree, where Kitty had been with me, when the great snow began. "You are only fit for a turtle-dove. Where is your gall?" he whispered.

It may have been a very low default on my part. But when my worst enemy lies on the ground, I would rather lift him up, than walk over him. My Uncle was of sterner stuff, or less live softness—for his injury had been more deadly. He tried to drag me forward; but I

would not budge, though I might make a beggar of myself by that refusal.

"Are you afraid to look at death, you white-livered young fool?" he whispered, and his face was black with the pitch of fury.

"I have been through ten times worse than death," I answered, looking at him stedfastly; "and the lesson I have learned is mercy."

Before he could answer, with the bitterness of justice, which to him was greater, two young women ran across the grass, and they both caught hold of me, and shrieked. I could not make out what they said, because it was mixed up with sobs, and they cried both together; but I left myself to them, and they drew me on to the place where their mother lay stretched upon the walk, with a medical man bending over her.

"Dr. Wiggins?" he asked; and I answered, "No, not a doctor at all." And he said, "Clear out; I shall take the four ounces, on my own responsibility."

"A friend of the family. A true friend of the family," Miss Jerry exclaimed, to my great surprise; but he answered—"Then let him get out of the way; and the sooner you go away too, the better."

The sour-faced woman, a faithful retainer, was supporting the poor lady's head on a cushion; and I scarcely allowed myself a glance at the proud face, now so deathly. But that one glance told me for ever, what all human pride must come to.

"Oh, come and see Downy! He can't be dead too. Oh, come, and forgive him, before he is dead."

Which of the girls said this, I know not. But I took up my hat, which I had thrown on the grass, and followed them to their brother.

There lay the man, who had robbed me of my wife, the cold-blooded, godless miscreant, robbed by his own hand for ever of all hope of due repentance. Within a few yards of him lay his poor father, dead as a stone, and cold as ice, slain by the wickedness he had begotten, shot through the heart, by his heartless son.

Donovan Bulwrag looked at me. He was sensible still; though before the waning light upon his ghastly face should vanish, light and darkness would be one to him. He knew me; and I am grieved to say, for his own poor sake, that he hated me still. He had not heard of Kitty's return, I suppose, having been so absorbed in his own affairs, and he muttered

through the red foam that streaked his lying lips—for he had fired the ball through the roof of his mouth—

"How like—darling Kitty—run away—with officer?"

"She is with me. Her father found out your tricks, and sent her home. She is well and very happy. She ran away with no officer."

"Let him alone, sir; don't excite him;" said the surgeon who was stooping over him. "I must have you removed, if you come near him." Then with another turn of thought he said,—"If there has been ill-will between you, make it up; he cannot last half an hour. Will you take his hand, if he wishes it?"

"With pleasure; but I know that he does not wish it. Do you wish me to take your hand, Mr. Bulwrag? If you do, look at me, and nod your head."

To my amazement, the dying man turned his eyes on me, and nodded his head. His eyes were clouded with the approach of death, and I saw very little expression in them. Then he moved his left hand feebly towards me, while the other dropped, as if through exhaustion, to the ground. My right hand lay in his clammy

palm; and bending forward I watched his face for some token of good will and penitence.

Suddenly a red glare as of lightning filled his eyes, his features worked horribly, and his great teeth clashed, as he tried to jerk me towards him. Luckily for me, I was poised upon both feet. At the flash of his eyes I sprang aside, a redder flash blinded me, and a roar rang in my ears, and upon the bosom of the dying man lay the short thick curl, the love-lock Kitty was so fond of playing with. The ball had passed within an inch of my temple, and my forehead was black with the pistol-smoke.

"Narrow shave"—said the doctor—"that will be his last act. I hope he will have life enough to know that it has failed. I had not the least idea he had got that revolver under his coat-flap. What are the police about? It's not my place to see to a thing of that sort. And he might have shot me, while he was about it! There he goes! I thought so. Serve him right."

The great head fell back, and the square chin dropped, a dull glaze spread upon the upturned eyes, a wan gray haze as of icy vapour crept across the relaxing face; and Donovan Bulwrag

was gone, to render an account of his doings in the flesh.

Mrs. Wilcox ran up with a sob, and fetched the heavy eyelids downward. "Poor young man! He have run his course. I hope he has gone to heaven," she said.

But my Uncle Corny looked at me, and at the fallen pistol. "I wish him only his due," he said; "and I hope he has gone to the Devil."

CHAPTER XXII.

ONE GOOD WISH.

THERE must have been a fearful scene, about an hour before we reached that spot. Two powerful wills were in collision—one hard as steel, the other trenchant and resistless as red-hot iron. For many days the conflict had been gathering force and fury, as the rising wind collects its power, before the outbreak of the storm.

The mother was resolved to pierce the mystery of her crafty son. The son was equally resolute to keep his fatal secret. And the father, turbulent and headstrong, wrapped in his own vindictive mood, cared not when the outbreak came, but looked forward to it grimly.

It had been impossible for Downy, as he had naturally foreseen, to keep entirely to himself the presence of a stranger in the house. Although the room was far away from the part his mother occupied, and darkened for the Pro-

fessor's use, and secluded by thick shrubbery, it soon became needful for the jailer to secure a confederate. With some misgivings, he took the sour-faced woman into his confidence, knowing her to be close and faithful, as well as clever and resourceful. But unluckily for himself he did not trust the woman wholly. Skinner, as she was called in the household, did not know the real import of the plan she aided. Falsehood was her master's nature, and he did no despite to it, by relapsing into truth. He told her a chapter of lies; and she had no inkling that the stowaway, whose face she was never allowed to see, was the husband of her mistress.

Thus she was not on her guard so strictly as she would have been, had she known the truth. To learn the existence of a secret is to be halfway towards it; and the pride as well as curiosity of the mistress was soon afoot. But the room was securely locked, and vain was any prowling round it; till indignation and sense of outrage grew no longer bearable.

After that public outbreak of passion, which had scared the cook, and Mrs. Wilcox, the lady of the house retreated to her room, and was taken or feigned to be taken ill. Her son was sent for, in great haste, and found her prostrate,

and broken down, scarcely able to speak, and quite unlikely to attack his stronghold again. His sisters implored him to take a cab, and follow the course of the only doctor who could relieve these perilous pains; and after seeing to his locks and bolts, he departed on that mission.

No sooner had the front gate swung behind him, than up jumped the feeble sufferer, wrote a few lines to the nearest blacksmith, and sent the boy in buttons to take them, with orders not to lose a moment. In a quarter of an hour the blacksmith and his foreman were at the obnoxious door, with sledge-hammer, crowbar, cold chisel, and wrench.

Some one within seemed inclined to help them, for they heard a heavy bolt shot back; but the door was fastened on the outside also with a heavy chain and padlock. The smith laid hold of this chain with his pincers, and so kept the padlock against the post, where a few swinging blows from the foreman shattered it, like an egg-shell. In a minute they cast the door back on its hinges, and a narrow dark passage was before them.

"Let no one follow me," said the lady of the house; "but wait till I return to you." She closed the heavy door behind her, and passed

through the gloom to an inner door. This was neither locked nor bolted, and she turned the handle and entered.

The room was lofty, but very dark. Not only the bulk of the ilex-tree, but close blinds, fixed in the window-frame, obscured the fading sunlight. The lady marched in with a haughty air; she would soon let this poor vagrant know, who was the owner of this house, and who the gutter-squatter. But suddenly she stopped, and speech was flown from her tongue to her eyes; she could only stare.

Against the high mantelpiece, whose black marble covered with dust was as dull as slate, a tall and bulky man was leaning, peacefully smoking a long cigar. The cigar was fixed between two strips of muslin, concealing the chin, lips, and nose, if any. A slouched hat, with a yellow feather in it, covered the hairless crown; and only the knotted forehead, and the fierce red eyes, showed that here was a human face alive.

But the massive cast of figure, and the attitude, and slouch, and even some remembrance of the fierce red glance, told the haughty woman who it was that stood before her. In a moment, fury changed to fear, and triumph became trembling.

Without a word she turned to fly; but a great muffled hand was laid on her.

"No hurry, faithful wife! You have insisted upon seeing me. Come to the light, and you shall have that pleasure."

The great figure swept her to the window with one arm, while she vainly strove to cry, or even to fall upon her knees. Then throwing back the blind, the leper drew her closer to him, and tearing off his swathings held her so that she must gaze at him.

"This is your work. Are you pleased with it? True love is never changed by trifles. Embrace me, my gentle one. You always were so loving. How you will rejoice to show a wife's affection, and to tend me daily; for I mean to leave you never more. Monica, gentle, loving Monica, whisper your true love where my ears used to be."

With the mad strength of horror, she dashed from his arms, and away through the passage, and would have escaped—for the poor cripple could only limp in pursuit—if she had not closed the outer door. By the time she had opened, he was upon her, and they staggered together across the broad walk, when their son from the gate rushed up to them.

"Oh, save me, save me from that beast," she cried.

"Off, and get back to your den!" shouted Downy.

"A nice son, to part his own parents!" As the old man spoke, he struck his son in the face with his maimed right hand, while he clung to his wife with the other.

Then Donovan Bulwrag, in the fury of the moment, drew his revolver, and shot his father through the heart.

The old man fell on his back a corpse, while the mother was dashed on the grass, and lay senseless. Donovan looked at them both, gave a laugh, put the muzzle in his mouth, and shot himself.

* * * * *

I have no intention to moralise—as a man always says when he begins to do it—but there ended three misguided lives; for although Mrs. Bulwrag recovered slowly some of her bodily health and vigour, her mind was never restored to life again. That hectoring will, and domineering spirit, lapsed into the weakness of a weanling child; and if ever the memory of those haughty days returned, it waned into a shudder, or an abject smile. When Captain—or as he

now is called Sir Humphrey Fairthorn came home from his celebrated enterprise, he made due provision in a private asylum for the lady who could no longer pick his pockets. The marriage settlements fell to the ground, with the downfall of the marriage, and six acres of "the most magnificently situated building land in London," returned to the heritage of Kitty's mother.

When my Uncle and myself came sadly home from that shocking and distressing scene, the power of it lay upon us still, so that we did not care to speak.

"Thank God," said my wife, as she fell upon my breast, after trying to sponge off the blaze from my temple, which would take some days to heal; "thank God that he is dead at last!"

Those are the only words of hers I have ever felt displeased with. At the moment they seemed harsh to me; by reason of the pity, which the eye engenders, but the tongue cannot advance. If she had come from that piteous sight, her heart would have been too soft for this.

"It is a good job for everybody else, and a bad one for him," said Uncle Corny; "he is gone where he addressed himself. He labelled

himself—'To the Devil with care—to be delivered immediately.' And then he goes and acts as his own porter. You need not look sentimental, Kit. What is England coming to? Lord bless my heart the stuff they talk about 'the sanctity of human life!' A good man's life belongs to God, and a bad one's to the Devil. And they have got themselves to thank for it."

A very broad saying is seldom deep; but the general vote was against me. And all being on the right side, of course, they backed it up with buttresses.

"Think of that poor man," said Kitty, who was always first to see things; "from what you say of his sad condition, and his size, and figure, I am quite sure it is the afflicted prisoner we rescued from the savages. You may talk of things not being guided by a Higher Power, and you may look black if it is hinted that a man shouldn't shoot his father, and then try to kill my darling Kit; but what can you say, when it comes to light, that but for his own wicked plot, the cruellest and the wickedest that ever entered human heart—or brain, for he never could have owned a heart—if it had not been for that, no doubt, he would have married a lovely girl—though some may call her too pale and

thin—and probably have stolen all her money, and no doubt broken her poor heart, as he did his utmost to break mine? And then in the very stroke of death, he tries to murder Kit again! Oh, how can I be sorry that we are safe from him at last?"

"Kitty is right," Miss Parslow said; "Kit would have killed that man, if he had caught him shooting Kitty. And that would have been the very next thing he would have done, if the Lord had spared him."

To this I could make no reply; for verily I believe it would have been.

"Take your wife home," said Uncle Corny, who always saw the right thing to do; "she is much excited. Avoid this subject, until you can speak of it calmly. Thank God for all His goodness to you; and let her nurse your wounded hair."

This made Kitty laugh and pout; and without another word I led her home.

I led my Kitty home, without any fear of losing her again, until, by the will of One who loves us, we bid each other a brief farewell. We live at Honeysuckle Cottage still, and wish to go no further, adding to it, as little Growers, like roses, cluster round us. We might lead a

gayer and noisier life, if that were to our liking; but we have seen enough of the world to know how nice it is, at a distance. Whatever the greatest people do I can read to Kitty in the evening; and she smiles or sighs in the proper places, without neglecting our own affairs. The puff of the passing world comes to us, like that of a train in the valley; or even as the whiff of a smoker in the lane comes over our wall with a delicate waft, albeit his tobacco is not first-rate.

Moreover we like to be, where pleasant friends drop in, and say—"What a sweet calm is here!" And where Uncle Corny still toddles up at supper-time every evening, and lays his now quivering hand upon the curls of his sturdy Godson Cornelius, and says, "You shall have all this place, my boy; for your rogue of a father is too rich to want it, with all that property in London. Let him grow houses, while you grow trees. Keep the old place on, if you can; and sell your own fruit, if you want to get the money."

Inditing of the higher fruit, that suffers no decay, and is meted in no earthly measure, the Rev. Peter Golightly enters, followed by his blooming daughter. He blesses all the little

ones; and so does she, by kissing them with her pure sweet lips.

"That's right, Miss Bessy, keep your lips in practice;" exclaims Uncle Corny in his rough old style; and a healthy blush mantles where the hectic colour was; for the gentle young lady has won the heart of the Vicar—not of Bray, but a parish very near it.

But which of them all can be thought of twice, with Kitty looking at me? My words must be plentiful indeed, if one can be spared for any other. Yet for two good reasons I will not attempt to praise her. Being a busy man I must forego all hopeless efforts; and again what would success be? Simply that, which according to the proverb, is "no recommendation."

So all who are well disposed can wish me nothing more complete than this, that I may live with her long enough to discover some defect in her. And in return I will inflict no moral but that of all true love—let every Kit be constant to his better self—his Kitty.

THE END.

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